

RANDHAWA INDIAN PAINTING GALBRAITH

INDIAN PAINTING  
THE SCENE, THEMES AND LEGENDS



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RAN

MOHINDER SINGH RANDHAWA  
JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

PAINTING  
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THE SCENE, THEMES AND LEGENDS

John Kenneth Galbraith once said that he accepted the post of Ambassador to India because he wanted to get seriously into the subject of Indian painting. One consequence of this love was that he and his fellow-author set about finding the very best of these paintings and arranging for their reproduction in the present book. Their jewel-like colors, fairy-tale people, gardens, palaces, trees, pools, fountains and animals, and the poetic stories they tell, will cast a similar spell on anyone fortunate enough to linger over this book. In all, thirty-five paintings are reproduced in full color.

The text is not that of the usual "art" book. It does not describe the accomplishment of the individual painters or their work. Nor is it in the often mysterious language of those who write about art. Rather, in clear and compelling English it tells the story of two-and-a-half centuries of Indian painting, from shortly before 1600 to shortly after the beginning of the nineteenth century, and of the unknown men in small workshops who sought to describe the life of their gods, rulers, women and love and of the legends that they had heard since childhood. Especially it tells of the princes and patrons who inspired the artists.

Mr. Randhawa sought out the chronicles that describe the setting of the paintings; Mr. Galbraith arranged them in a consecutive and fascinating story. Green hills, glittering streams, distant mountains and lovely women, royal pomp and luxury, epic poetry and legend of mystical reverence all pass in view. The story celebrates the love passages that so strongly influence Indian art, for the Hindus, long before Freud, had a sophisticated view of the bearing of sex on the human personality.



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INDIAN PAINTING

RANDHAWA AND GALBRAITH



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# INDIAN PAINTING



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The Bath. Guler, about 1760  
*Kapur Collection, Punjab Museum, Chandigarh*

# INDIAN PAINTING

*THE SCENE, THEMES AND LEGENDS*

MOHINDER SINGH RANDHAWA

*and*

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

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The four lines from "Song of a Man Who Is Loved" by D. H. Lawrence are from *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, Volume I, edited by Vivian de Sola Pinto and F. Warren Roberts.

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## FOREWORD

WE STARTED THIS BOOK in the early spring of 1963 in the Kangra Valley, on the edge of the Himalayas, in northern India. It was at the tiny courts of Kangra that artists fleeing from Delhi and the Persian marauder Nadir Shah received refuge toward the middle of the eighteenth century. As artists they were fortunate. It is a land of green hills, glittering streams, distant towering mountains and lovely, clear-featured women. And, after the pomp and luxury of the great Muslim courts, they also found new and deeper themes in the Hindu epics, especially the legends of Krishna and the *Bhagavata Purana*, which were revered by the people of the valley. They developed what is now called Kangra painting. Our journey was to visit the crumbling forts and palaces and the magic countryside which two centuries before had nurtured these wonderful pictures.

Our journey was perforce a leisurely one. This is a land of warriors as well as beautiful women, and a member of almost every family serves in the Indian army. A few months before, the quarrel between India and China had erupted into open warfare. Many Dogras from Kangra were engaged. Their families knew that the United States had given support to India; they considered it their personal responsibility to return thanks. So, at each village we were met by local officials and speeches and often a band—proving that on occasion Americans are thanked very ceremoniously for help. On the way home we decided to write a book about this valley and its rulers, courts and people and their painters. Presently we expanded the enterprise to tell of the other states, rulers and courts, great and small, where painting flourished.

All painting belongs to its own setting, but this is especially true of Indian painting—of the work of the unknown men in the little workshops who sought to tell in pictures of the life of their gods, of their rulers, of women and love, of their legends and the poetry which they had heard recited from childhood. Most books on painting talk about the paintings. They tell in impressive language what the reader can see for himself or what he would see were he as sensitive as the writer. Our plan was to reproduce the very best of Indian paintings, or anyhow those that we liked the



most; but instead of talking much about the paintings we concluded that we would tell of the rulers, courts, countryside and legends that gave them being. It is a good story, and we had no interest in producing one of those munificent volumes that people greatly admire and never read.

Where two men work together on a book, each should do what he does best. We worked closely on the selection of the paintings here reproduced. That, after all, was the greatest pleasure. Our responsibilities on the text, however, have been very different. We sought where possible to tell of the court life and the social setting of the painting in the words of contemporary observers. For centuries visitors to India have felt compelled to tell less fortunate people of the wonders of what they saw. Perhaps they were not always perfect chroniclers; the tendency to exaggeration by travelers is not new. Yet these men saw the court of Akbar and Muhammad Shah and Sansar Chand, and we have not. It was the first-named author of this book who sought out and organized these descriptions which are the heart of our text, and who filled in the gaps between. The second author made it into the story.

Anyone who undertakes to assemble nearly two-score precious paintings—block makers should, when possible, work with originals—for printing in one country and publishing on the other side of the world will have some knowledge of the complexity of our task and obligations. Our plan was to publish only paintings that had not previously been reproduced and that were not generally accessible to the American or European public. Our deepest gratitude is to the individuals and museums who made available their treasures. A special word of thanks must be given the Maharaja and Maharani of Jaipur, who generously allowed us to reproduce no fewer than five paintings from the superb collection that is their legacy from the noble artistic patronage of this great Rajput house. Our debt to Maharaja Sardar Singh of Kishangarh, descendant of the most inspired patron of Rajput paintings, Maharaja Dr. Karni Singh of Bikaner, Maharaja Dr. Karan Singh of Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. B. S. Mehta, Chief Secretary of Rajasthan, Mr. W. G. Archer, Keeper Emeritus of the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, and to the distinguished private collector Kanwar Sangram Singh of Jaipur is almost equally great. We are especially grateful to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for her gracious permission in allowing reproduction of two paintings from the magnificent *Shahjahan-nama* in her collection. Our further debt to the Indian museums and private collectors is evident.

We must also say a word about our engraver. For a book on art the engraver is obviously as important as any author. Bad writing can be skipped but not bad reproductions. In this volume we sought to combine American virtuosity in book-making and publishing with Indian talent in reproduction. This talent, the product of a high artistic tradition and much patient work, is to be seen in every one of the paintings we reproduce. Whatever the merits of our selection, we believe that no one

will think ill of the quality of the reproductions. That is why we have been proud to count as our collaborator in this enterprise the distinguished firm of F. R. Poonawala, father and sons, of Commercial Art Engravers of Bombay, who so obviously share our pleasure in these paintings.

The printing has been done by Messrs. Vakil & Sons Private Ltd., Bombay, who have specialized in the printing of art books, and have many national awards for quality printing to their credit.

Finally, the second author must thank his two friends and assistants: Mrs. Andrea Williams, who, as so often before, accomplished the many tasks involved in seeing the book through the press, magnified in this case by the circumstance that part of the operation was in India; and Mrs. Grace Johnson, who typed, retyped and then retyped the manuscript, all with remarkably good nature, and may in consequence be the first person in history who can recite the text of a book on Indian painting by heart.

MOHINDER SINGH RANDHAWA

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH



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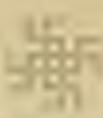
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## MAP OF INDIA

OF 200 B.C.-A.D. 1850  
showing centers of painting

# INDIAN PAINTING





Ajanta

## CHAPTER I

### THE SCENE AND SOURCE

FOR ABOUT two hundred and fifty years, from the middle of the sixteenth century until partway into the last century, India was the scene of some of the world's most enchanting painting. There was much about it that differed from Western painting. The painters were humble men working in small shops and their names are mostly lost to history. The pictures they painted were small; they had started as manuscript illumination and later were meant to be seen in a book or portfolio and not to decorate a wall. There were some men of brilliant originality and many more who were talented copyists. No one will ever know which was the work of which. Their output was prodigious, much of it commonplace, but enough of it exquisitely good to give the museums and private collections of India a surfeit of

riches. Some of the best work remains to this day with the descendants of the patrons; some for a century has scarcely seen the light of day.

But in other respects Indian painters shared a tradition common to all artists. They flourished when they had generous and sensitive patrons and their work met an appreciative response. It was a reflection of its scene and setting. It owed much to its antecedents; while it is convenient to begin the story of Indian painting with the rise of the Mughal empire, the painters of this time, both at the Mughal courts and elsewhere, were descendants in a much older line. And Indian painting was profoundly influenced by Indian literature. As the Renaissance masters turned to the New Testament, so the Indian painters turned to the Hindu epics. In part they saw their task as bringing these into visual reality for men who could not read and knew them only by ear. In this chapter we say a brief word on the setting of Indian painting from its brilliant explosion into life under the Mughals to its final death under the Queen Empress Victoria. In the next chapter we tell of the poetry that gave the painters their greatest themes.

The setting, if one thinks of India as a great diamond, suspended southward from the Himalayas, is the corner to the top and to the left (see the map on pages xiv-xv). It includes the plains of the upper Ganges, the dry and—as one goes westward—desert country of Rajasthan and the green valleys in the foothills of the Himalayas. This was the part of India that the Mughal conquerors from central Asia invaded by way of the Khyber Pass in the early decades of the sixteenth century. They brought with them a lively intellectual and scientific curiosity, a sound and eclectic taste, an unequaled instinct for architecture and a deep interest in painting. Their capitals at Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri and Delhi, all on the upper Ganges plain, are monuments to the most inspired builders after the Greeks. In these lovely capitals, from the sixteenth century on, the Emperors, especially Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan (who built the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort at Delhi) encouraged their painters. Some they brought from Persia, and these men and their students were influenced in turn by an older Indian tradition. They created what the world has come to call Mughal painting. It depicted with precision of line, vivid and harmonious color and a wealth of refined detail the princes, princesses, courtiers and concubines of the courts, their adventures and sports, and the flora and fauna of India.

To the west of the three Mughal capitals are the principalities of the Rajputs, who were yet earlier Aryan intruders from central Asia. The Mughals were, of course, Muslims; the Rajputs were Hindus. The Rajputs were warriors, and when not engaged in hunting each other they contented themselves as best they could with tigers, lions and other lesser vertebrates. They too were builders and their capitals, fortresses and palaces—those of Amber and Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, the distant desert capital of Jaisalmer—are among the great sights of present-day India. Nowhere in the world is feudalism so recent; the princes ruled, subject to the paramount

power of the British, until 1947. Their power gone but their titles still intact, they even now inhabit one or more of their vast palaces.

According to inclination and temperament, the Rajputs fought for or against the Mughals. But however they reacted to the conquerors, they were profoundly influenced by their art. Artists came to the Rajput courts from the capital—some for hire, some, evidently, as a kind of early form of cultural exchange. And the Rajput courts drew heavily on the earlier Hindu modes and themes. Out of the combination each court developed its own distinctive school. In later times the Rajput courts became places of refuge for painters from the less hospitable or declining Mughal power.

Rajasthan is a land of strong earth colors. Some parts are green and bright with desert flowers for a few weeks during and after the monsoon; for the rest of the year the yellows and rust-reds of the desert predominate. In summer, the vegetation is bleached to a dry brown. The arid plains are relieved by hills and escarpments; over many of them march the crenelated walls and towers of old Rajput fortifications. One thinks, sometimes, of half-serious imitations of the Great Wall. Rajput painting has the same strong lines, the same strong colors and the same chivalric architecture as that of the land from which it comes.

On the northern and western edge of the Indian diamond, on the north of the present state of the Punjab, there are more Rajput states. These are in valleys in the foothills of the Himalayas and sometimes deep in the mountains. Unlike the feudal states of Rajasthan, they are minute—some are only a few thousand acres. Their Rajas were also compulsively warlike; but, being a small people, they had to make do with small wars, though of compensating ferocity. They were otherwise removed from the larger convulsions of the plains below. Some of these tiny courts may have had an ancient tradition of painting; in any case, when from the mid-seventeenth century on the great court in Delhi was beset by disorder, pillage and poverty, the artists came here for food and shelter. The valleys—Kangra, Chamba, Kulu—are cool and green and the landscape is rich and varied. The men are tall, strong-featured and self-confident; the women are tall and slender, with high, firm breasts and tranquil, fair and aquiline faces. They may well be as lovely as any on earth. They believe also that women were meant for love. Again the painting follows the scene and subject. It is cool, soft in color; the landscape is rich and varied; the women are numerous and beautiful; love is a recurrent theme. Anyone who knows the painting of these valleys feels, on his first visit, that it is a place that he has seen often and knows well.

In 1526, Babur, the first of the Mughals, crushed the forces of Ibrahim Lodi and ended the Lodi dynasty on the classic Indian battlefield of Panipat. Early in the last century cheap lithographs, the status value of European gimcracks, and the declining prestige of the patrons brought the painting we here describe to an end.

These dates roughly bracket the period with which we are concerned. But, as in all such matters, any date one sets as the beginning is formal and artificial. The Mughals, as noted, drew on the ancient and highly developed manuscript art of Persia. And both their painters and those of the Rajput courts were influenced by an even more ancient Indian tradition.

The most important surviving expression of that earlier tradition is the painting in the cave temples of Ajanta, dating onward for centuries from about 200 B.C. The Buddhist monks who were the sponsors of this work loved nature and located their temples in places of great natural beauty. The twenty-nine caves at Ajanta, discovered in modern times, are carved from an outward arching cliff, within sight and sound of the Waghora River in front. It is a setting of exceptional charm. Though the paintings have disappeared from some of the caves, and others were damaged by early visitors and copyists, Ajanta remains one of the world's most fascinating art galleries.<sup>1</sup> No serious visitor to India should miss it.

The Ajanta paintings tell mainly of the chief events in the life of the Buddha and the Jataka stories, which describe his previous incarnations. These tales were narrated by the Buddha himself to illustrate to his audiences his doctrine that good actions secure a higher and better status in the next birth, while the reverse leads to the appropriate demotion. But the Ajanta paintings are softened by Mahayana Buddhism of the first century which tempered the asceticism and concern for personal salvation of the older, Hinayana creed. As a result the paintings blend sensuous with spiritual moods. They are characterized by supple naturalism and fluid grace and reveal the rhythmic line that remained the basis of Indian painting in the succeeding centuries. There is furthermore a sense of relief and roundness; the figures stand out in the darkness of the caves to give an impression of a living humanity. This impression also survives in the best Indian painting.

The Ajanta artists were especially skilled in bringing their subjects into a vivid and bustling life. The palace and toilet scenes show crowds of women with lotus eyes and full breasts. Their hair is in elaborate coiffure; their hands seem to quiver with nervous vitality. The rich brown of the figures stands in warm contrast with the background leaves of plantains and asoka trees.

One painting at Ajanta is of Sundari, the wife of Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother, often wrongly described as "The Dying Princess." She was one of the most beautiful women of the age, and Nanda was very reluctant to leave her. On learning that her husband would be deserting her she faints. John Griffiths has said of this painting: "For pathos and sentiment and the unmistakable way of telling its story this picture, I consider, cannot be surpassed in the history of art. The Florentine

<sup>1</sup>The technique of painting was as follows. On the hard Deccan trap a base layer of clay mixed with rice husk and gum was laid. Over this a coat of lime was applied and the surface was smoothed with a trowel. An outline of the subject was drawn in pinkish brown or black and afterward the colors were filled. These were, among others, red and yellow ochre, vermilion, malachite green, lampblack and ground lapis lazuli which were mixed with gum. Blue color appears only in the fourth and fifth centuries and was made from lapis lazuli imported from central Asia.

could have put better drawing, and the Venetian better colour, but neither could have thrown greater expression into it.”<sup>2</sup>

Ajanta had a wide influence on Indian art. At Bagh in western Malwa, there was painting contemporary with the sixth-century paintings at Ajanta. They are in the same technique and style. A panel in which a number of women are shown giving a dance performance is one of striking beauty; the women dancers are drawn with the same skill and feeling that is shown at Ajanta.

Under the patronage of the Pallava king Mahendra Varman (600–625), who was himself a poet and musician, paintings were done in the Jain caves of Sittanavasal near Pudukottai in the Tiruchirapalli district of Madras State. On the ceiling of the cave is a lotus pool with fish, water birds, elephants and buffaloes. A young man is shown plucking lotus buds. There are two graceful figures of *apsaras*, or heavenly dancers, whose supple bodies are drawn with rhythmic grace. These paintings have been ascribed to the middle of the ninth century and the influence of Ajanta is evident.

Again the distant echoes of the Ajanta art are heard in the paintings of the Pala period from the eleventh to the early twelfth century. The chief religion of the Pala kings, who ruled in the area of present-day Bengal and Bihar, was Buddhism. Palm-leaf paintings of Buddhist religious texts are characterized by the same softness and tenderness of treatment of the Ajanta style. Their rhythmic line is combined with compelling colors. This style later spread to Nepal and elsewhere in the eastern Himalayas and Tibet.<sup>3</sup>

In the twelfth century, contemporaneously with the Buddhist Pala dynasty but on the other side of India, wealthy Jain merchants of Gujarat began to patronize artists. Thus was born what has come to be known as Jain painting. At first this was on palm leaves; but in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Muslim invaders from Afghanistan came down to the Indian plain bringing much devastation and hardship and the remarkable innovation of handmade paper. Jain painters converted to paper, although for a long time the long narrow format of the palm-leaf manuscript was preserved.

The artists of the Jains were indirectly subsidized by the Muslim rulers. The latter forbade expenditure by the Jain merchants on temples, so there was no alternative in using surplus wealth save to employ artists. The religious text of the Jains is the *Kalpa Sutra*. Art and salvation could be combined by having the artists illustrate it. For safety these paintings were hoarded in underground cellars.

Jain painting makes lavish use of gold, blue and red colors. Figures are opulent with sharp chins and noses. The face is shown in three-quarter profile with an eye projecting into space. Persian influence is seen in colors, costumes of some male figures

<sup>2</sup>In G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Part III, Text (Oxford, 1946), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>The influence of Ajanta extended beyond India to Afghanistan, central Asia and China. It is marked in the affluent beauty of the women painted in the great rock fortress of Sigiriya in Ceylon in the early sixth century.

and in decoration of borders. Narration, not expression, is the dominant purpose of the Jain art.

In the history of Indian painting, artists were most creative when they had the patronage of kings with a zest for life. Akbar and Jahangir, Sansar Chand of Kangra, and Sawant Singh of Kishangarh were all such men. They were generous and communicated to their artists their own enthusiasm for love, adventure, indulgence and beauty. The Gujarati Jain merchants, by contrast, were puritanical, vegetarian and abstemious. The Chinese traveler Yuan Chwang, who visited India in 606-612, wrote of their country with considerable brevity: "The climate is warm, windy and dusty. The disposition of the people is cold and indifferent."

Puritanism and art do not go together. The Jains were stern and rigorous men—and so remain. Their religious teachers still wear a piece of cloth tied over their mouth lest they inadvertently inhale and thus immolate an insect. For the same purpose they carry a broom with which they sweep the ground before them. Their most compassionate diversion is to feed wheat flour to ants. In their sermons they show pictures to their followers to remind them of tortures which they will suffer in hell if they drink alcohol, eat meat or patronize the dancing, music or other charms of public women. Artists require a more liberal world. Accordingly, although the Jains contributed a style and a technique to the development of Indian painting, including the use of bright colors and gold, their legacy was small compared with the litesome and sensuous grace of the Buddhist art of Ajanta.

In the seventh and early part of the eighth century Arabs united for the first time in their history and, their enthusiasm kindled by the new faith of Islam, swept over Syria, Egypt, Persia, northern Africa, Asia Minor and Spain. In 711, they turned their attention toward India and conquered Sind. In the eighth century they brought the Turks within the fold of Islam, and in 962, Alptigin, a Turk, established a kingdom in Afghanistan with Ghazni as his capital. Alptigin was followed by his son and then by three of his slaves, the last of whom, Sabuktigin, in 976 founded a dynasty which survived for about two centuries. Sabuktigin's son and successor, Mahmud of Ghazni (998-1030) then raided India. India, at the time, consisted of a number of kingdoms ruled mostly by Rajputs; they naturally refused to be diverted from their preferred avocation, which was fighting each other. And so Islam gained a strong foothold in India.

Al-Biruni, a Muslim scholar who traveled in India, provides us with a vivid picture of the Hindu society in the first quarter of the eleventh century. The Hindus were self-approving and complaisant. No other country approached them in science or religion; they claimed a near monopoly of knowledge. Outsiders, with the exception of the Greeks, whom, though impure, they honored for their science, were regarded as barbarians. And it is true that in philosophy, mathematics and astronomy they had remarkable achievements to their credit. Among other things they had

invented the zero and thus were able to count in millions and billions while their neighbors had a ceiling of a thousand. In time this would probably have proved a serious budgetary constraint. Their sculpture and painting were distinguished. However, it was also a society confined rigidly by its past. The caste system was already firmly established. Brahmans had the monopoly of learning and education and the Rajputs of military service. Talent in other castes remained unutilized. One reason the democratic religion of Islam won so many adherents from the farmers and artisans of Sind and the Punjab was the escape it provided from the restraints of caste. The same was later to be true of Christianity in the far south.

In 1192, Muhammad Ghori defeated Prithviraj Chauhan, the Rajput king of Delhi. This far-reaching event extinguished Hindu power in northern India. On the assassination of Muhammad Ghori in 1206, his viceroy, Qutb-ud-din Aibak, became the first Muslim king of Delhi. Northern India was ruled thereafter by a succession of Pathan kings, of whom the most important were the Khiljis (1290–1320), the Tughlaqs (1320–1414), the Sayyeds (1414–1451) and the Lodis (1451–1526). This period of Pathan rule was singularly sterile in Indian artistic history. The rulers adhered faithfully to the Islamic ban on the art of painting, and none has been traced to their patronage. The principal artistic occupation of the kings and their nobles was the building of tombs which are still to be seen by the scores in the suburbs of south-western Delhi.

Under the Tughlaq dynasty, the central power in Delhi steadily weakened and Muslim governors of outlying provinces began asserting their independence until Timur's sack of the city in 1398. Ata-ud-din Bahman Shah (1347–1358) was the first to break away; he established an independent kingdom in the Deccan which continued till 1527. In 1394, Jaunpur in Bihar became independent under Sharqi kings, who ruled up to 1479. Gujarat became independent in 1396 under Muzaffar I and maintained its independence till 1572. In these new kingdoms painting revived.

The revival in the Muslim kingdom of Malwa is the most significant. Malwa comprises the present-day territories of Dhar, Ujjain, Indore and Gwalior in central India. It is a fertile country producing rich crops of wheat, cotton and oilseeds. Because of its elevation it has a mild climate and nights are particularly pleasant in summer. In the eighth century it was ruled from Mandu by the Rajput Parmara kings. In the days of its prosperity Mandu was a great fortress, and still to this day it is one of the noblest ruins in all India. It stands 2079 feet high on a plateau of the Vindhya range overlooking the valley of the river Narbada. Its walls were 37 miles in circumference and enclosed an area of 20 square miles. After 1226, it was laid waste on three occasions by the Pathan kings of Delhi. In 1392, Dalawar Khan Ghuri, a Muslim Turk, established an independent kingdom at Mandu. From 1436 to 1531, it was ruled by Khilji Pathans. Unlike the other Pathan kings, the Khilji Pathans were broad-minded and tolerant. Hindus were well treated. The Islamic ban on painting was forgotten.

From 1469 to 1501, the ruler was the remarkable monarch, Ghiyas-ud-din. When Ghiyas-ud-din became king, he gave a grand feast to his nobles and told them that he was tired of war and intended to spend the rest of his days in ease. Then, more even than now, it almost certainly took moral courage to be against slaughter. Jahangir, the Mughal emperor, tells in his *Tuzuk* of Ghiyas-ud-din's speech to his officers and soldiers. "In the service of my revered father, I have passed thirty years in warfare and have committed no fault in my activity as a soldier; now that my turn to reign has arrived, I have no intention to conquer countries, but desire to pass the remainder of my life in ease and enjoyment." Jahangir tells further of Ghiyas-ud-din's arrangements for his enjoyment. "They say that he had collected 15,000 women in his harem. He had a whole city of them, and had made it up of all castes, kinds and descriptions—artificers, magistrates, qazis, kotwals, and whatever else is necessary for the administration of a town. Wherever he heard of a virgin possessed of beauty, he would not desist until he possessed her. He taught the girls all kinds of arts and crafts, and was much inclined to hunt. He had made a deer park and collected all kinds of animals in it. He often used to hunt in it with his women. In brief . . . he went against no enemy, and passed this time in ease and enjoyment. In the same way no one invaded his country."<sup>4</sup>

During the reign of Ghiyas-ud-din and his son and successor Nasir-ud-din (1501–1512), and faithful to the rule that pleasure fosters art, painting developed wonderfully at Mandu. A volume on cookery, termed the *Niamat-nama* and to cook-books what the Taj Mahal is to gravestones, was produced about 1500. In some of the fifty superb illustrations, Ghiyas-ud-din is shown surrounded by his numerous women attendants, some of them dressed in male attire. In them, as W. G. Archer has pointed out, we see the mingling of Persian and Jain traditions. The projecting eye of the Jains disappears, and there is a tenderness and poetry which did not exist in the Jain paintings. The artists had imbibed the atmosphere of the City of Joy, as Mandu was called by its Pathan rulers, and their work was the better for it.

Over Mandu lingers the memory of its last king Baz Bahadur and his lady Rupmati. Their romance has been narrated with great charm by Leslie M. Crump in his *The Lady of the Lotus*.<sup>5</sup> It provided Indian artists with a much loved theme.

Bazid Khan (1531–1561), or Baz Bahadur, which means the "Brave Falcon," was the last king of Malwa. Rupmati was the daughter of a Rajput chieftain, Than Singh Rathore; she lived in a small castle in the town of Dharampuri, situated in the valley of the river Narbada. She was an accomplished poetess and musician and was also exceedingly beautiful. When she was fourteen years of age on the occasion of the Basant Panchami, or Festival of Spring, she went with her maidservants to have a bath in a sacred pool in the forest. Baz Bahadur was out hunting in the same forest on that day. As he was stalking a deer he heard a voice of great charm and sweetness.

<sup>4</sup>Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, translated by Alexander Rogers and edited by Henry Beveridge, Vol. I (London, 1909), pp. 366–367. Oriental Translation Fund, Vol. XIX, n.s.

<sup>5</sup>Ahmed al-Umri, *The Lady of the Lotus, Rup Mati*, 2nd ed., translated, etc., by Leslie M. Crump (London, 1928).

Leaving his retinue, he crept to the pool and through the leaves saw the fair face of Rupmati, and, naturally, much more. After an ample and rewarding watch, he revealed himself to her and her companions. The startled maidservants tried to shield the naked princess behind a sari. (The attempt at modesty, automatic, inevitable and regretted, was also much celebrated by artists.) Rupmati was, for her part, equally impressed by the youth and handsome appearance of Baz Bahadur. He revealed his identity to her, made a confession of his love and asked her to be his queen. Amazed and excited, she could give no reply. Then Baz Bahadur left. For a long while she stood, her eyes fixed on the retreating figure of the king, and then her companions shook her from the reverie and took her home.

Her companions told her mother, who in turn told Rupmati's father. The Rajput chieftain was furious; he could not have his daughter marrying a Muslim. To save the honor of the family he gave orders that she should be poisoned. The family priest, evidently a sensitive man, asked that the action be postponed so that the holy festival day would not be defiled by a murder. This appeal to better nature succeeded. Rupmati was confined to a room with orders that poison be given the next morning.

She, not surprisingly, had a sleepless night. While waiting for the cupbearer to bring the poison that morning, she heard a great noise. Baz Bahadur had stormed the castle to rescue her. He took her to Mandu and made her his queen. Infatuated by the beauty of his bride, he neglected state business for time in her company. They sang to each other the love songs they had composed. Rupmati sang:

The *Chakor* pines for the moon,  
And the peacock for the cloud,  
That is love's way.  
The heart longs for a heart,  
And thinks not of high and low,  
That is love's mystery.

Mandu has many wonderful buildings, including the royal mosque of white marble built by Hoshang Shah which is said to have inspired the architecture of the Taj Mahal at Agra. There is also the great "Ship Palace," shown at the beginning of the next chapter, which is set between two lotus-studded lakes. But the most enchanting is the palace of Baz Bahadur with Rupmati's pavilion in the background. On moonlit nights when Baz Bahadur was called away to trouble spots of his kingdom, she sat here and sang:

Dressed in the beauties of nature  
I am going to the moon today.  
The delicate strings of my heart  
Are touched and I am gay.  
What a bliss! I am doubly blessed  
My eyes and his travel by the same ray.

At Mandu, Baz Bahadur was surrounded by numerous women of the harem, including his senior queens. In her poems Rupmati compares him to a lotus and herself and the other queens to bees. To get her king away from the other bees, and to provide fuller as well as more exclusive scope for love she sought to lead him to far-off places. Thus they rode together over the plateau of Malwa, through the hills and forests by night with the moon and the stars as their companions. This ride was also beloved by artists; we show one version in Plate 7.

The days of happiness for the lovers came, however, to an end. Akbar had established himself as the emperor of India and was extending his power in central India. He sent a large army under his general Adham Khan to subdue Mandu. After looting the royal treasury and performing other acts of military administration common to the time, Adham Khan turned his eyes to the women of the harem and to the fabled beauty of Rupmati. He told her, generously, he would marry her. A brutal, ruthless but simple soldier, it did not occur to him that love arises from affinity of souls and is not a transferable commodity. Rupmati resisted and escaped from Mandu disguised as a flower seller. She was pursued, captured and brought back.

Adham Khan persisted. Eventually, Rupmati sent him a message of her consent and asked him to visit her next morning. Adham Khan spent the night in celebration. Rupmati had a bath, put on the bridal dress which Baz Bahadur had given her, sang a number of her favorite songs of her own composition and then took poison of powdered diamond. When morning came, Adham Khan went to her palace, brushed the maidservants aside and stood near the door for a while admiring the calm beauty of Rupmati's face. Then he boldly stepped forward and found her face ice-cold. He was, the legend says, a very disappointed man.

He met a fitting end. Akbar was annoyed at his misconduct, especially by his habit of retaining the women of the harem as well as the more commercial spoils of war. He was recalled, and when he committed some further crime was thrown over the parapet of the Agra fort into the ditch and so killed. Baz Bahadur had a happier fate. After wandering for eight years as a refugee, he entered the service of Akbar.

Painting flourished during the reign of Baz Bahadur, although there are differences of opinion over the attribution of some of the surviving paintings. The artists used strong primary colors—yellow, deep green and red—appropriate to the passion the colors signified. The women have flowing skirts, narrow waists and full hips and breasts. They appear in pavilions of chaste architecture decorated with rich pillows. The drawing is precise and the trees and foliage are simplified and stylized in a manner soon to be identified with the painting of southern Rajasthan (see Plate 11).

With the overthrow of Baz Bahadur, painting at Mandu came to an end. As ever, the patron was important. His overthrow appears also to have set in motion one of the first of the migrations of artists, nearly all induced by military disasters, which

were to mark the history of Indian art. Painting in the Mandu style reappears, with modifications, elsewhere in Malwa and it influenced painting southward in the Deccan and even more strongly that of adjacent Mewar in Rajasthan. In all the discussion of painting at Mandu there is a large element of speculation. But its development, before the patronage of Akbar and the birth of Mughal painting, was assuredly one of the great formative currents in Indian art.



Ship Palace in Mandu, the City of Joy

## CHAPTER II

### THE LEGENDS

**A**BOUT 1600 B.C. to 1500 B.C., the north of India was invaded by the nomadic Aryan tribes. They were a branch of the Indo-European group which had migrated from the steppes south of the Ural to Europe, Iran and central Asia. From central Asia they moved into Afghanistan and India. These Aryans, or Noble Ones, as they modestly called themselves, were tall with fair skin, regular features and prominent noses. They were pompous and boastful and contemptuous of the Dravidian aboriginal inhabitants, who, they felt, should also suffer for their dark color.

The wealth of the Aryans consisted mainly in cattle, but they cultivated barley, their favorite cereal, as well, in forest clearings around their fortified wooden villages.

They were brave soldiers and their weapons were bows, spears, bronze swords, axes and slings. They were fond of hunting, gambling and chariot-racing and they owed their success against the local population to the mobility of their horses and light chariots as compared with the clumsy elephants of their opponents. They gradually conquered and destroyed the fortified brick-built towns of the Indus Valley urbanites, and degraded the people to the position of serfs—hewers of wood and drawers of water. Untouchability is supposed by many to trace to this degradation. From Sind and Punjab, the Aryans spread to the heartland of northern India, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The language of the Aryans was sonorous Sanskrit. Their gods were the personification of natural phenomena like rain, sun, fire and dawn. Soma, an intoxicating liquor, was their favorite drink. Their religious books were the four Vedas, of which the *Rig-Veda* was composed between 1500 B.C. and 1000 B.C.

India has a tradition of love poetry stretching to the age of the Vedas. Climate has an undoubted bearing on love and on passion—and perhaps also on the size of the population—and the climate of India is unquestionably favorable. The sages of the Vedas expressed delight in the charm of female beauty, and in the *Rig-Veda*, Usha, the goddess of dawn, is compared to a maiden who unveils her breasts to her lover. The love charms of the *Atharva-Veda* are thought to mark the beginning of erotic poetry and are designed to serve the most useful of purposes. Some charms or spells serve to put the household to sleep when the lover enters his sweetheart's home by night; some win a woman's love; some insure a successful pregnancy; some obtain matrimonial bliss. Some spells enable a woman to fix a man's love, and some dispose of female rivals, which was a very useful spell in a society of plural marriage.

The epics of the Aryan Hindus are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They are believed to have been compiled about 500 B.C. and provide a panoramic view of contemporary Indian life. The *Ramayana* was written by the sage Valmiki. It is believed that the second wave of Aryan invaders and settlers pushed across the Jumna River about 1000 B.C. into what is now Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Painted gray pottery and the iron-tipped plow are associated with these migrants.

One of these Aryan kings was Dasratha. Ayodhya in the later kingdom of Oudh was his capital. Dasratha had four sons from two wives, of whom the eldest was Rama. Rama, in turn, was married to Sita, daughter of King Janaka of Mithila in Bihar. The youngest son was Bharata, whose mother was Kaikeyi, the younger and favorite wife of Dasratha. Kaikeyi was an intriguer and, faithful to the tendencies of beautiful and ambitious royal mothers, prevailed upon the aged Dasratha to banish Rama and to install her son Bharata as the king. Very unwillingly Dasratha did so. The faithful wife Sita and a loyal brother, Lakshmana, accompanied Rama into exile. The trio wandered in the forests of central and southern India for fourteen years.

One day during their wandering the two brothers were decoyed away by a

golden deer. Sita, whose beauty had become known far and wide, was then abducted by Ravana, the King of Lanka, the modern Ceylon. A war between Rama and Ravana followed in which the latter was defeated, and Sita was rescued from her captivity. After his victory, Rama returned with Sita and Lakshmana to his home capital of Ayodhya; here he was installed as the king. Sita, on account of her beauty, was subjected to an ordeal of fire to prove her constancy. She came out unscathed and was accepted by Rama as his queen. This did not wholly settle matters. After some years, because of the slanderous remarks of a washerman to his profligate wife, there were renewed doubts as to how Sita had comported herself while she was in captivity at Lanka. Though she was pregnant, the righteous Rama banished her. Her twin sons, Lava and Kusha, were born in the forest. (Lava was to become the reputed founder of modern Lahore.) Rama performed the *ashvamedha yajna*, in which a horse was let loose, eventually to be sacrificed. The horse was captured by Lava and Kusha, who had been living with the sage Valmiki, who had taught them the *Ramayana*. An encounter between the father and the sons followed, resulting in reconciliation. Sita, who had suffered this second and unjust exile, was swallowed by the earth in response to her own prayers. The *Ramayana* is enacted all over India after the rains in the form of a drama festival called the Rama Lila. The festival culminates with the burning of the effigies of the wicked Ravana and his associates. The *Ramayana* assures men of the triumph of good over evil. And it teaches them the values of conjugal fidelity, brotherly love and obedience to paternal authority.

The *Mahabharata* is reputed to be the work of the sage Vyasa. The title refers to the great war of the Bharatas. The major theme of the epic is the war of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, which was a family feud. The Kauravas were headed by the evil-minded Duryodhana. Their cousins, the Pandavas, were five brothers, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. The Pandavas founded the city of Delhi at the site of the Purana Qila, while the Kauravas ruled from Hastinapur. The five Pandavas were all married to a single beautiful woman, Draupadi, who was evidently a unifying influence in their lives, and indicates that polyandry was a recognized practice in that age.

As the result of a gambling bout the Pandavas lost their kingdom to Duryodhana and were forced to spend thirteen years in exile. When the stipulated period of exile came to an end, the Pandavas asked for the return of their kingdom. Duryodhana refused even to part with a single village. So the Pandavas won the friendship of Krishna, who became their adviser and, later on, the charioteer of Arjuna, one of the brothers. The armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas met at Kurukshetra, near modern Karnal in the Punjab. When Arjuna saw his numerous relations and kinsmen arrayed on both sides and all prepared and eager for an immense slaughter, his courage failed him and he dropped his bow. It was then that Krishna delivered his famous discourses of the *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizing the supreme importance of doing one's

duty in the fight against evil. Arjuna was convinced. There followed the eighteen days' battle in which the Kauravas were defeated.

Apart from the story of the Pandavas and the Kauravas and their great war and Krishna's discourses of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata* contains a large number of myths and legends. One, the story of Nala and Damayanti, was the theme of many paintings in the Kangra style, and we shall return to it later.

The epics teach that married life and procreation were necessary for a householder; they are righteous conduct and the result of natural yearning for final liberation from the cycle of birth. Thus, in the *Mahabharata* is the legend of the ascetic Jaratkaru, who, because of fasting and penance, became a living skeleton. Praying and bathing at holy places, he came to a cave. Here he saw emaciated and woeful beings hanging head down and clinging to a bunch of grass, which in turn was being gnawed by a mouse. Moved by pity, he asks the wretched creatures, "Who are ye? When the mouse has gnawed through this one root, then ye will fall headlong own. What can I do for you unhappy ones? I will give you a fourth, a third or the half of what I have earned by penance, or even the whole of it, to save you." They replied: "Thou art old, and livest in chastity, but our sore plight cannot be altered by asceticism. We ourselves have penitential fruits. It is through the lack of offspring that we are falling into the unclean hell. For to beget offspring is the highest duty and virtue, so Brahma has said . . . Therefore do we hang in the cave, robbed of consciousness. The mouse is time, which now having gnawed through all our other family threads, is fastening its teeth, too, into the last: into that simple, mad Jaratkaru, who yearns only after asceticism . . . If thou seest him, tell him what thou has seen, that he may take a wife and beget sons."<sup>1</sup>

Jaratkaru learned his lesson. He abandoned all thought of bringing his body chaste into the next world, promptly married a maiden to bring forth a child, and so saved his fathers from hanging like bats in a cave with the ever-haunting fear of falling into hell. Such is the high instruction of the epics. It was an instruction which the artists pictured in a hundred ways.

Two further Sanskrit classics held a mirror to contemporary Hindu social life and had a profound influence on literature and subsequently on sculpture and painting. These are Bharata's *Natyashastra* and Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra*.

The *Natyashastra* was probably written in the second century A.D. by a sage known as Bharata, but the tradition it records goes as far back as the first century before Christ. It takes the form of a dialogue between the author and other sages, and is a treatise on dramaturgy, poetics, music and dance. In the area of dramatic art, it examines the emotions of men and women, and formulates the doctrine of *rasa*, or aesthetic experience. This is to be understood by analogy to eating food flavored with

<sup>1</sup>Johann Jacob Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India* (London, 1930), Vol. I, pp. 147-148.

different kinds of spices. As one enjoys the varied tastes, so a cultured person savors in his mind the sentiments of love, sorrow or mirth embodied in a work of art. There are eight such flavors, and each has an underlying emotion, which is the foundation of a work of art. Of these, the erotic flavor, the underlying emotion of which is love or desire, is the foundation of the most beautiful poetry, painting and sculpture. It arises in the enjoyment of music, poetry, favorite seasons, fragrant garlands, in roaming in gardens and in being in the company of those one loves.

The *Natyashastra* also classifies men and women, who are called *nayaks* and *nayikas*, which means heroes and heroines, or lovers and loved, according to their physical and mental traits, emotional states and situations. These became a major theme of Indian painting. It further classifies emotions of woman, the stages of a woman's love, the kinds of female intermediaries between lovers and their various meeting places. Indeed in its zest for classification this work is comparable to that of the European botanists and zoologists of the early nineteenth century. Certainly the emotional condition of men and women in love has not elsewhere been examined with such taxonomic enthusiasm.

The *Natyashastra* also provides examples of metrical patterns as an aid to composing poetry. The meter known as *Pravara-lalita* is rendered thus: "Her body has been scratched by nails, and lips and the cheeks are bitten by teeth, the head is set with flowers, hairs have their ends dishevelled, and her gait is languid, and the eyes are restless. Ah, a very graceful exploit of love has taken place in a praiseworthy manner."<sup>22</sup> The *Lalita* meter, personified as a beautiful woman, is given as follows: "O lady, hurriedly but gracefully moving the beautiful clothes and the delicate hands and having a blooming lotus-like face you look charming after the fatigue of love's sports."<sup>23</sup>

The life described by the *Natyashastra* was neither dull nor puritanical. Bharata deals mainly with the life of kings and the aristocracy and thus instructs them on life and love. "I shall now speak in detail about the rules regarding the practice of kings in relation to 'homely' [home-loving] women and these rules are taken out of the Science of Erotics . . . Kings have no difficulty in obtaining women; because means for this is at their command. And the love that grows out of liberality becomes pleasing. Out of respect for the queens and for fear of their favourite women, kings are secretly to make love to queen's maids. Though the kings may have many ways of making love, making it secretly will be the most pleasing of all. That a woman resorts to wily ways, that one is shut out from her and she become available only with difficulty, imparts the supreme pleasure to her love. In case of women of the harem, the king's union with them in day time may be permitted, but in dealing with external women union should take place at night."<sup>24</sup>

Courtesans, whose names ended in -datta, -mitra and -sena, were valued companions of kings and enjoyed great esteem because of their learning and more normal

<sup>22</sup>Bharata, *The Natyashastra*, translated by Manomohan Ghosh (Calcutta, 1951), p. 279.

<sup>23</sup>*Natyashastra*, p. 294.

<sup>24</sup>*Natyashastra*, pp. 466-467.

accomplishments. Their attendance on the Indian kings seems to have been long-standing; Sicritus, who accompanied Alexander on his invasion of the Punjab in 326 B.C., thus describes the well-tended existence of Sophites, a Kshatriya king of Sambhuti in the region of present-day Gurdaspur and Amritsar. “[The king’s] principal exercise is hunting, amid the vows and songs of his courtesans he shoots the game enclosed within the royal park . . . He is accompanied by a long train of courtesans carried in golden palanquins . . . His food is prepared by women, who also serve him with wine, which is much used by all the Indians. When the king falls into a drunken sleep his courtesans carry him away to his bed chamber, invoking the gods of the night in their native hymns.”<sup>5</sup>

The *Kama Sutra* was compiled by Vatsyayana from some previous text during the fourth century A.D. In addition to being a book on sexual art it is an informative record of the social and cultural life of the period. The Hindus were conscious of the bearing of sex on human personality, and in this anticipated by some centuries Freudian psychology. They did not regard it as profane nor did they shroud it behind an embarrassed veil of secretiveness. It was a subject for scientific and objective study and the *Kama Sutra* is a codification of the sexual experience and manners of the age.

It reveals a happy, materialistic urban society with no pessimism about the next world. The upper classes spoke in Sanskrit as the educated middle classes speak in English in present-day India. Manners were refined; people wrote verses and affected a snobbish interest in arts. Courtesans, known as *ganikas*, were educated and cultured women who knew poetry, dancing and music. They lived in elegant, well-decorated houses that contained statues and murals. Some of them kept wine shops in gardens and doled out sura liquor to their admirers from the windows of their garden shops, which were adorned with flowers. Resemblances to the ancient Greek society are easily discernible. It is to be recalled that the Greeks divided women into two categories, wives and courtesans. Wives lived in rigid seclusion and attended exclusively to their husbands and homes. The courtesans, or hetaera, had unrestricted freedom, were employed for dancing, flute-playing and other entertainment, and frequently attained high social position. The model selected by Praxiteles for the nude Venus which was presented to the city of Cnidus was the hetaera Phyrne. She had excited the admiration of a crowd by bathing naked in the sea. A courtesan in a Hindu court of the age of the *Kama Sutra* could have acquired similar fame.

Four kinds of gardens are described in the *Kama Sutra*. Private gardens inside the palaces were for the enjoyment of kings and queens. In semiprivate gardens in outer courtyards of palaces the kings passed their time playing chess with their courtiers and watching danseuses and hearing jokes of the court jesters. The third type of garden was for the pleasure of ministers and courtiers. The fourth type, called *nandanavanas*, were dedicated to the god Indra and were accessible to common people.

<sup>5</sup>R. C. Majumdar, *The Classical Accounts of India* (Calcutta, 1960), p. 105.

For *nagarikas*, well-to-do townsmen or men of culture, the *Kama Sutra* recommended building a house close to a pool (in India called a tank) and surrounding it by a garden. In the garden there should be swings and a bower covered with creepers. Sugarcane, mustard, fennel and parsley were to be planted, and jasmines, amaranth, the moon-beam and a grass with a fragrant root called *khās* were also recommended. The house should have two rooms, the inner one for females and the outer for the *nagarika*. The outer room was to be furnished with a bed covered with a clean white cloth with a canopy above it. There should be ointments and a pot containing collyrium and flowers. The *nagarika* was a man of leisure, and spent most of his time in cultured ease and idleness. He engaged in clay-modeling and wood-carving and otherwise amused himself by watching the fights of quails, cocks and rams and by teaching his parrots and mynahs to talk.

In social gatherings the main diversion was completion of verses half composed by others and in drinking and holding picnics. Regarding drinking parties Vatsyayana observes: "Men and women should drink in one another's houses. And here the men should cause the public women to drink, and should then drink themselves, liquors such as the Madhu, Aireya, Sura and Asawa, which are of bitter and sour taste; also drinks concocted from the barks of various trees, wild fruits and leaves."<sup>6</sup> Other diversions were sporting in the water, enjoying the moon-lit night and pelting one another with the ball-like flowers of the kadamba.

In the society described by the *Kama Sutra* there were no child marriages; only grown-up girls were married. When a girl became of marriageable age the parents dressed her smartly and sent her with female companions to sports, religious festivals and marriage ceremonies so that she would be seen by persons who might be interested in marrying her. Apart from reading and writing, girls were also taught the art of making garlands, cooking food and playing with dice and cards. The *Kama Sutra* expounds the rules of courtship, marriage and wifely duties with great detail and precision.

The *Kama Sutra* had great influence on Sanskrit and Hindi literature as well as on sculpture and painting. The Sanskrit poets studied the *Kama Sutra* eagerly along with grammar, lexicography and poetics. Thus the poet Amaru in *Amaru Sataka*, the century of stanzas, composed between 650 and 750, draws on it in the following stanza: "The house parrot overheard at night some dalliance of the young pair and in the morning began to repeat it unduly before their elders; so the young wife in shame stays his speech by putting in his beak a fragment of ruby from her earring, on the pretext of giving him a pomegranate fruit."<sup>7</sup>

Sriharsha, the author of the *Naishadhacharita*, in the second half of the twelfth century, follows the *Kama Sutra* in describing the married bliss of Nala and Damayanti.

<sup>6</sup>Vatsyayana, *The Kama Sutra*, translated by Sir Richard Burton and F. F. Arbuthnot, edited by W. G. Archer (London, 1963), p. 115.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London, 1928), p. 187.

Jayadeva, the author of the *Gita Govinda* and the court poet of Lakshmanasena (1179–1205), the Hindu king of Bengal, bases his descriptions of the love-sports of Radha and Krishna on the *Kama Sutra*. The songs of the Bihari poet Vidyapati and the greatest poet of Bengal, Chandi Das, also show its influence.

Today one sees the influence of the *Kama Sutra* most vividly in the mediaeval sculpture at Khajuraho, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Konarak, Belur and Halebid. In the doorways, niches and friezes of these and a number of other southern India temples, exuberantly erotic couples make love through all time. Most important for present purposes are the many paintings and series of paintings in the Mughal and Rajput schools which are based on its themes. Ingenious and metaphysical explanations in pedantic and abstruse language have been devised to justify the sexual candor of this art. Scholars thus sought to surround it with a protective aura of Victorian middle-class respectability. Doubtless then it was necessary to soften the impact of the shock. But, in fact, the ancient Hindus merely echoed the feelings of most healthy and normal beings when one of them, scorning circumlocution, sang:

Man longs for woman  
As the parched frog longs for the rain.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India to 1000 B.C.* (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1950), p. 272.



Fatehpur-Sikri, the birthplace of Mughal painting

### CHAPTER III

#### THE BIRTH OF MUGHAL PAINTING

**F**EW RULERS have left such a legacy in the arts of peace as the three Mughal emperors of India—Akbar (1556–1605), Jahangir (1605–1627), and Shah Jahan (1627–1658). In architecture they left the spacious and elegant forts and palaces and the exquisite mausoleums and mosques at Agra, Delhi and Fatehpur-Sikri. They gave India formal gardens of great beauty with new flowers and shrubs from central Asia. In Urdu they provided a language to the Indian people which broke the barrier between the ruling classes and the ruled. And they gave India the style of painting which has become known by their dynastic name.

The foundation of the Mughal empire was laid by Babur in 1526 when he defeated the Pathan king of India, Ibrahim Lodi, at Panipat. This was the first time

that gunpowder was used in warfare in India, and Babur's victory was due largely to his artillery. He was also accomplished in the arts of peace. He was a talented poet in Turki and Persian, and "his battles as well as his orgies were humanised by a breath of poetry."<sup>1</sup> His Turki poems are still read. In his earlier days he amused himself by writing satirical verse. Later he gave it up; a heart elevated to nobler conceptions should not, he thought, occupy itself with mean, despicable fancies. He was his own historian and Laurence Binyon has said of his memoirs that they "form one of the most lively documents of self-revelation in all the literature of autobiography."<sup>2</sup> They also show a highly cultured and observant mind, and a transparent honesty. Their author was fond of wine and music and was a lover of nature and flowering plants. During his stay in Kabul he repeatedly described the beauty and elegance of Bagh-e-wafa, the Garden of Fidelity, which he laid down in the city. Even when he was in mortal danger, he lingered in the garden to write, "One apple tree had been in excellent bearing. On some branches five or six scattered leaves still remained, and exhibited a beauty, which the painter, with all his skill, might attempt in vain to portray."<sup>3</sup>

When Babur settled at Agra, on the Ganges plain, he was oppressed, as were men before and many since, by the heat, dust, strong winds and the stern and arid aspect of this land. But instead of dreaming of the cool mountains of central Asia he occupied himself with laying out a garden in which he built baths and planted narcissuses and roses. When it was completed he told of his pleasure; he had succeeded in making a garden full of beauty and symmetry in a country which he described as "devoid of charm and lacking in order." Agra was to profit even more from his descendants.

Babur was succeeded by his son Humayun (1530–1556), who, though charming and cultured, lacked the vigor, stamina and administrative ability of his father. He was driven out of Delhi by the Afghan Sher Shah in 1540 and spent fifteen years in exile in Persia and Afghanistan. At the court of Shah Tahmasp of Persia he came in touch with the paintings of the Persian artists Aga Mirak, Sultan Muhammad and Muzaffar Ali. These were pupils of the legendary Bihzad, who has also been called "Raphael of the East." Later at Tabriz he met the poet and painter Mir Sayyid Ali, who had distinguished himself as one of the illustrators of Nizami's *Khamsah*. Then, in 1550 at Kabul, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad from Shiraz joined Humayun. He, and his son Akbar, took lessons in drawing from the artists, and the two royal wanderers had their interest in painting confirmed. When Humayun regained his throne, both the artists accompanied him to India.

Akbar is the real founder of Mughal painting. After he had consolidated his

<sup>1</sup>Babur, *Memoirs of Zehir-ed-Din Muhammed Babur*, translated by John Leyden and William Erskine (London, 1921), Vol. I, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>Laurence Binyon and T. W. Arnold, *The Court Painters of the Grand Moguls* (Oxford, 1921), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals* (London, 1924), p. 51.

political power he built a new capital at Fatehpur-Sikri, some twenty-three miles from Agra, and provided it with numerous palaces, mosques, baths, schools and its library and mint. In this great, brooding, deserted city, largely intact and, for many, the greatest sight in all India, there is a full synthesis of Rajput Hindu and Muslim architecture. Hindu art motifs, such as lotus medallions, bells and chains, hanging balconies, latticed windows and airy pavilions stand in graceful harmony with Islamic arches and domes. Among the red sandstone buildings are the exquisite tomb of the saint Shaikh Salim Chishti, the lattice screens of which are an embroidery in marble, the Panch Mahal, a fairy palace of five stories borne by open colonnades and topped by numerous pavilions, and the palaces of the several queens. For reasons of policy, Akbar married out of the great religions of his land and he provided each queen with a residence befitting, architecturally, her faith.

At Fatehpur-Sikri, Akbar collected architects, writers, poets, musicians, philosophers, painters and calligraphers. "Fatehpur Sikri rivalled or surpassed Herat in the time of Baisunqur . . . and the feverish intellectual and creative activity of the cities of Italy in the heyday of the Renaissance . . . As the barren ledges of rock had been transformed into palaces and gardens with stretches of shining water, and as the flowers had been sown in the gardens, and trees planted in the alleys, so artists had been collected from all quarters and settled in the palaces and workshops, and bidden to flourish and create."<sup>4</sup> Never before in the history of India (and perhaps not since) had men of talent received such encouragement.

The Pathan kings had failed as rulers, Akbar realized, because they regarded themselves as aliens. They lived as colonists in India; their thoughts turned always to their ancestral land. Their bureaucracy was recruited from the Islamic lands of Persia, Arabia and Afghanistan; they rarely employed Hindus in positions of trust and responsibility. To ensure employment for their sons, the nobles and officers married women from Kashmir so that their progeny would pass as white among the color-conscious central Asians and Persians. Akbar's policy was more liberal. He won over the Hindu Rajputs, who had earlier offered him brave resistance, and employed them in his army. Man Singh of Amber, ancestral figure of the modern house of Jaipur, became Akbar's most trusted general. He then consolidated his relations with these princes by forming matrimonial alliances with the royal houses of Amber and Jodhpur.

Akbar was a discerning judge of men, and, in recruitment, ignored considerations of caste, color and creed. His trusted courtiers included men like Todar Mal, who organized the revenue system, Birbal, known for his wit and humor, and Tansen, the singer. All were Hindus. As concession to Hindu sentiment, he used to paint the Hindu sectarian mark on his forehead once a week and thus appear in the audience hall to the annoyance of orthodox Muslims. He also listened to the Hindu Pandits, and, though impressed, was not convinced.

<sup>4</sup>Laurence Binyon, *Akbar* (London, 1932), pp. 74-75.

Akbar was likewise much impressed by the Zoroastrian doctrine of sun worship and held in great respect Dastur Meharji Rana, a Parsi priest from Gujarat. He also looked into the newly developing Sikh faith. Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, was accused of treating with contempt the Hindu gods and the Muslim prophets. Akbar examined his writings and found love and devotion to God and said they were worthy of reverence.

Because, it is said, of difficulty in obtaining good water, Akbar abandoned Fatehpur-Sikri in 1585. The remaining twenty years of his reign were spent at Lahore, the noble city, in what is now Pakistan. Here he took the next step in his religious education and interested himself in Christianity. He received the Jesuit missionaries Father Montserrat, Ridolfo Aquaviva and Jerome Xavier with cordiality; the last was his companion on a journey to Kashmir. Akbar thought well of Christ and his religion of love, but he had difficulty with the complicated doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And when he was told that he could not keep more than one wife, he decided that it was an inconveniently restrictive faith because he had, by now, three hundred wives in the harem. His interest in Christianity faded, and the Jesuits lost the hope of another Constantine.

Now persuaded that none of the major religions could satisfy him, Akbar finally invented his own. He called it *Din-i-Ilahi*, or Divine Faith, and, thoughtfully, became his own first Prophet. Two of his courtiers who were also scholars of eminence, the brothers Abul Fazl and Faizi, became his chief disciples. Alas, this faith did not prove viable.

Many other matters came under the eye of this remarkable man. *Ain i Akbari* gives an account of his views on marriage.

Every care bestowed upon this wonderful tie between men is a means of preserving the stability of the human race, and ensuring the progress of the world; it is a preventive against the outbreak of evil passions, and leads to the establishment of homes. Hence His Majesty, inasmuch as he is benign, watches over great and small . . . He abhors marriages which take place between man and woman before the age of puberty. They bring forth no fruit, and His Majesty thinks them even hurtful; for afterwards, when such a couple ripens into manhood, they dislike having connexion and their home is desolate.

Here in India, where a man cannot see the woman to whom he is betrothed, there are peculiar obstacles; but His Majesty maintains that the consent of the bride and bridegroom, and the permission of the parents, are absolutely necessary in marriage contracts . . .

His Majesty disapproves of high dowries; for as they are rarely ever paid, they are mere sham; but he admits that the fixing of high dowries is a preventive against rash divorces. Nor does His Majesty approve of every one marrying more

than one wife; for this ruins a man's health, and disturbs the peace of the home. He censures old women that take young husbands, and says that doing so is against all modesty.<sup>5</sup>

He was equally rational in his own domestic management. Abul Fazl, the Boswell of Akbar, thus describes his household arrangements.

His Majesty is a great friend of good order and propriety in business . . . For this reason, the large number of women—a vexatious question even for great statesmen—furnished His Majesty with an opportunity to display his wisdom, and to rise from the low level of worldly dependence to the eminence of perfect freedom. The imperial palace and household are therefore in the best order . . .

His Majesty has made a large enclosure with fine buildings inside, where he reposes. Though there are more than five thousand women, he has given to each a separate apartment. He has also divided them into sections, and keeps them attentive to their duties. Several chaste women have been appointed as *dáróghahs*, and superintendents over each section, and one has been selected for the duties of writer . . .

The inside of the Harem is guarded by sober and active women; the most trustworthy of them are placed about the apartments of his Majesty. Outside of the enclosure the eunuchs are placed; and at a proper distance, there is a guard of faithful *Rájputs*, beyond whom are the porters of the gates. Besides, on all four sides, there are guards of Nobles, Ahadís, and other troops, according to their ranks.

Whenever *Bégums*, or the wives of nobles, or other women of chaste character, desire to be presented, they first notify their wish to the servants of the seraglio, and wait for a reply. From thence they send their request to the officers of the palace, after which those who are eligible are permitted to enter the Harem. Some women of rank obtain permission to remain there for a whole month.

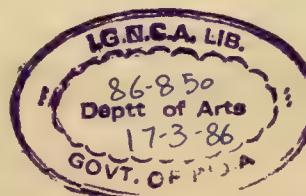
Notwithstanding the great number of faithful guards, His Majesty does not dispense with his own vigilance, but keeps the whole in proper order.<sup>6</sup>

More than a hundred painters were employed in the royal atelier at Fatehpur-Sikri. Most of these were Hindus from Gujarat, Gwalior and Kashmir. They worked, in turn, under the two Persian master artists, Abdus Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali, but they were encouraged and inspired by Akbar. Abdus Samad was styled Shirinqalam, or Sweet Pen. Of him Abul Fazl remarks, "his perfection was mainly due to the wonderful effect of a look of His Majesty, which caused him to turn from that which is form to that which is spirit."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Abul Fazl, *Ain i Akbari*, translated by H. Blochmann (Calcutta, 1873-1894), Vol. I, pp. 277, 278.

<sup>6</sup>*Ain i Akbari*, Vol. I, pp. 44, 45.

<sup>7</sup>*Ain i Akbari*, Vol. I, p. 107.



Orthodox Muslims believed that on the day of Judgment God will call upon the painter to put life into his pictures, and when he confesses his inability to do so, he will be sent to hell. (The prospect for abstract expressionists would seem rather unpromising.) By starting a school of painting and bringing together Persian and Indian artists, Akbar was taking a heretical and thus spiritually dangerous step. There was opposition from the orthodox mullahs. Abul Fazl observed: "Bigoted followers of the letter of the law are hostile to the art of painting; but their eyes now see the truth. One day at a private party of friends, His Majesty, who had conferred on several the pleasure of drawing near him, remarked: 'There are many that hate painting; but such men I dislike. It appears to me as if a painter had quite a peculiar means for recognizing God; for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individuality upon his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the Giver of life, and will thus increase in knowledge.' "<sup>8</sup>

Abul Fazl tells also that the works of the painters were laid before Akbar weekly and he used to confer rewards according to the excellence of workmanship. Akbar had special admiration for the work of Hindu artists, notably Daswanth and Basawan. "Their pictures," Abul Fazl said, "surpass our conception of things. Few indeed in the whole world are found equal to them."<sup>9</sup> The Emperor also encouraged portraiture. He sat for his own portrait and ordered that likenesses be painted of all the grandees of the realm.

Akbar was very fond of the stories of Amir Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet. The illustration of these stories, the *Hamza-nama*, was the first work entrusted to the Persian master Mir Sayyid Ali. Plans called for 1400 pictures in 14 volumes and the task was completed in 15 years. The pictures are of large size, 20×27 inches, and, unlike other Mughal paintings, are painted on cloth. They are in Persian Safavi style: brilliant red, blue and green colors predominate; the pink eroded rocks and the vegetation, planes and blossoming plum and peach trees are reminiscent of Persia. However, Indian tones appear in later work as Indian artists were trained.

Akbar's religious interests led him to the Hindu classics and he ordered his artists to illustrate the epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. This led to one of the greatest creations of his period, the illustrated *Mahabharata*, called *Razm-nama*, now in the Palace Museum at Jaipur. It contains 169 full-page paintings and was completed in 1589; it is said that 400,000 rupees were paid to the artists. The chief artist was Daswanth, son of a palanquin-carrier. According to legend his genius was evident from his earliest years; as a boy he used to draw figures on walls. These came to the notice of Akbar, who sent him to the workshop of his artists. Abul Fazl tells that, "in a short time he surpassed all painters, and became the first master of his age. Unfortunately the light of his talents was dimmed by the shadow of madness; he committed suicide."

<sup>8</sup>*Ain i Akbari*, Vol. I, p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>*Ain i Akbari*, Vol. I, p. 107.

Mughal painting was a cooperative work in which numerous artists and craftsmen participated. Junior artists assisted by grinding the materials that provided the pigments, and in burnishing paper. The thick handmade paper used for paintings came into general use only in the reign of Akbar; it was at first imported from Persia, but later a factory was established at Sialkot in the Punjab. The fibers were cotton, bamboo and jute. The painter's brushes were made from the fine hair from the tail of the squirrel. The first outline on the burnished paper was made by the master artist in Indian red. Over this a white priming coat was then laid. Then over the lines of the preliminary sketch, the painter made his final outline in black. The master artist now visualized the color scheme and indicated the colors that were to go on various parts of the painting. Blue color was made from lapis lazuli imported from central Asia, red from red ocher and Indian red (*hurmachi*) extracted from oxide of iron found in Jabalpur in central India. Another of the reds came from cochineal. Still another was a crude cinnabar called *shangarf* which provided the brilliant red often used in Persian painting. Yellow was from orpiment, a sulphide of arsenic. Gold came from gold leaf. In each case colors were mixed in gum and actual application was often the work of junior artists. At this stage painting might be the illustration of a book, to be integrated with fine calligraphy, or it might stand alone. Paintings were often on both sides of the paper and the sheets were bound as an album.

Much of the painting of the Akbar period shows a restless energy; the painters in their work reflected the exuberant activity of their patron. Figures are shown in hurried movement and the compositions are crowded. This is particularly so in the *Timur-nama*, *Babur-nama* and *Akbar-nama*, the great pictorial sagas of the Mughal rulers.

One of Akbar's more energetic hobbies was riding *mast* elephants. During their rutting period male elephants become savage; their drivers are included in their animosity. The *Akbar-nama* tells many stories of Akbar and such beasts. In Plate 1, from the *Akbar-nama* of the Victoria and Albert Museum, he is mounted on an elephant named Hawai, and chasing a *mast* elephant named Ran Bagha. Hawai, a favorite elephant of Akbar was, according to Abul Fazl, "in fierceness and wickedness . . . a match for the world." He mounted the elephant and in the polo ground outside the fort of Agra, executed numerous maneuvers and then pitted him against Ran Bagha. On hearing of this performance, the contemplation of which "turned the gall-bladder of the lion-hearted to water," his Prime Minister, Ataga Khan, implored Akbar to abandon the game. "Great and small raised hands of entreaty," but Akbar went on with the sport, terrifying his courtiers, until Hawai defeated Ran Bagha. What followed is thus narrated in the *Akbar-nama*: "The lion-hearted Shahinshah calmly went on with his terrifying pursuit until the elephant Hawai by the strength of a hidden arm, and the Divine fortune, got the victory over his opponent. Ran Bagha let fall the strong cable of steadfastness and turned to flee. Hawai looked neither behind nor before and disregarded heights and hollows and went like the wind in pursuit of the fugitive. His Majesty, a rock of firmness, continued to sit steadily and



Plate 1. Akbar and a *mast* elephant on the bridge of boats. From the *Akbar-nama*.  
Mughal, about 1600. Victoria and Albert Museum, London

to watch the ways of destiny. After running a long way, the elephant came to the edge of the river Jamna, and to the head of the great bridge of boats. Ran Bagha in his confusion went on to the bridge, and Hawai, with the tiger of fortune's jungle [meaning Akbar] on his back, came upon the bridge behind him. Owing to the great weight of those two mountain-forms the pontoons were sometimes submerged and sometimes lifted up. The royal servants flung themselves into the river on both sides of the bridge and went on swimming until the elephants had traversed the whole of the bridge and got to the other side."<sup>10</sup>

This is the violent scene which the artist paints and the plate reproduces. The river is the Jumna and the bridge of boats on which the elephants are racing is buckling under their weight. While Akbar, who is prodding Hawai with a goad, remains cool there is panic on all sides.

We turn now to the patronage of an equally discriminating but less energetic sovereign.

<sup>10</sup>Abul Fazl, *The Akbarnāma*, translated by H. Beveridge, Vol. II (Calcutta, 1904-1910), pp. 233-234. Bibliotheca Indica Collection of Oriental Works, Vol. 138, published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal.



The Hall of Private Audience, Agra Fort

#### CHAPTER IV

#### MUGHAL PAINTING UNDER JAHANGIR

IN JAHANGIR (1605–1627)—he ascended the throne at the age of thirty-seven—Mughal painting found its most enthusiastic patron. The son of a Rajput queen, he was thus half Indian by blood and, unlike his predecessors, was born and reared in India. In his love for nature, poetry and also wine, he resembled his great-grandfather, Babur. Like him also he had a talent for observation, which found outlet in his autobiography. Whatever his failings as an administrator, he had a keen sense of justice; whoever tugged at the bell which he had hung below his palace was given a hearing. Capricious officials knew that the oppressed would be heard and they came to know that their own trial would be summary.

William Hawkins, who was for some time Jahangir's boon companion, has

left an account of his daily life. In the morning Jahangir used to pray facing west in a private room in which there was a picture of Christ and Mary graven in stone. He then showed himself to the people at the palace oriel window. After this he went to the female apartments; thereafter he rested until three and then witnessed elephant fights and other sports. In between he heard and decided cases. For his evening meal he had four or five kinds of well-dressed meat, after which he retired to his private room, where only his most intimate servants could meet him. There he had five cups of wine and later opium. For the ruler of a great state it was a notably sedentary life.

As a youth Jahangir fell in love with a slave girl named Anarkali, meaning "Pomegranate Bud." One day he was watching his tumbler pigeons, of which he was fond, in flight. He entrusted two of them to Anarkali. When he returned after a short while he found that she had only one, and asked her, "What happened to the other?" She replied that it had escaped. He asked her, "How did he escape?" She said, "Like this," and let the other one go. These innocent gestures fascinated Jahangir. But Akbar learned of the infatuation with mortal consequences for the girl. Her tomb is in Lahore; the main shopping street carries her name.

In 1611 Jahangir married the widow of a Persian adventurer, Sher Afghan. This wife was given the name Nurjahan, "Light of the World." Nurjahan was a woman of extraordinary beauty, who, apart from her physical charm, was also highly educated in Persian, a poetess and person of commanding intellect. To her we owe the discovery of the attar of roses. The Venetian traveler Niccolao Manucci tells how. Nurjahan had arranged a feast for Jahangir and ordered that the reservoirs in the palace be filled with rose water. In the morning she noticed a film of oil floating over the water. Passing her hand over the oil and smelling she found it most fragrant. So she rubbed some on her clothes, and hastened to embrace the king. He was lost in admiration at her discovery.

In addition to such technical innovation, Nurjahan introduced changes in women's fashions. She had a strong taste for the arts and was ambitious and loved power. Brushing aside the convention of female seclusion she showed herself to the people at the palace window, and accompanied Jahangir in hunting. In later years, Jahangir further minimized the tensions of imperial life by remaining drunk for extended periods. He lost control over the state administration to Nurjahan, who issued orders on his behalf.

Jahangir sober responded strongly to natural beauty. When he saw the valley of Kashmir he said: "Kashmir is a garden of eternal spring . . . a delightful flower-bed, and a heart-expanding heritage for dervishes. Its pleasant meads and enchanting cascades are beyond all description. There are running streams and fountains beyond count. Wherever the eye reaches, there are verdure and running water. The red rose, the violet, and the narcissus grow of themselves; in the fields, there are all kinds of flowers and all sorts of sweet-scented herbs more than can be calculated. In the soul-enchanting spring the hills and plains are filled with blossoms; the gates, the walls, the



Plate 2. Jahangir and a wounded lioness. Mughal, about 1610  
*Indian Museum, Calcutta*

courts, the roofs, are lighted up by the torches of banquet-adorning tulips. What shall we say of these things or of the wide meadows and the fragrant trefoil?"<sup>1</sup> On visiting the meadows of Kuri-marg, which was full of Alpine flowers, he wrote, "As far as the eye could reach flowers of various hue were blooming, and in the midst of the flowers and verdure beautiful streams of water were flowing; one might say it was a page that the painter of destiny had drawn with the pencil of creation. The buds of hearts break into flower from beholding it."<sup>2</sup>

The painting under Jahangir reflects strongly this feeling for natural beauty. Whenever he came across an unusual plant, bird, or animal, he asked his artists to paint it. In his *Tuzuk* he gives a delightful description of the fragrant trees and shrubs of India, the *champa* (*Michelia champaca*), the *maulsari* (*Mimusops elengi*) and the jasmine (*Jasminum grandiflorum*). Unlike his predecessors, who never forgot the grapes and peaches of central Asia and Afghanistan, he avowed that no fruit of those regions was equal to the Indian mango.

Jahangir's most talented painter of plants, birds and animals was Mansur. He conveys in his paintings something of the spirit of plants and the character of the birds and animals which are his subjects. He was a diligent worker—more than a hundred flowering plants of Kashmir and numerous peacocks, pheasants, ducks and herons are the work of his hand. He has also left a striking painting of a turkey cock that was presented to Jahangir by the Portuguese and thus was new to India.

Akbar once fell in a trance while out hunting. It led him to consider relinquishing the material world, or, in Abul Fazl's words, to gather up "the skirt of his genius from the worldly pomp." The same mystical strain was continued in Jahangir. He was fond of meeting Muslim Sufis and Hindu mystics, and mentions his visits to Mian Mir, a Muslim Sufi, and Jadrup, a Hindu mystic who lived near Ujjain. Of these meetings he wrote: "On Saturday, for the second time, my desire for the company of Jadrup increased. After performing the midday devotions, I embarked in a boat and hastened to meet him, and at the close of day I ran and enjoyed his society in the retirement of his cell. I heard many sublime words of religious duties and knowledge of divine things. Without immoderate praise, he sets forth clearly the doctrines of wholesome Sufism, and one can find delight in his society. He is sixty years old. He was twenty-two years of age, when, forsaking all external attachments, he placed the foot of determination on the highroad of asceticism, and for thirty-eight years he had lived in the garment of nakedness."<sup>3</sup>

Mughal emperors and princes meeting fakirs and sadhus became a favorite subject for Mughal painters. Their theme of deeper mystical experience separates them from the other Mughal paintings. It separates them most notably from the pictures of hunting, although this was another passion with Jahangir. Whenever he

<sup>1</sup>Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, translated by Alexander Rogers, and edited by Henry Beveridge, Vol. II (London, 1914), pp. 143-144. Oriental Translation Fund, Vol. XXII, n.s.

<sup>2</sup>*Tuzuk*, Vol. II, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup>*Tuzuk*, Vol. II, p. 52.



Plate 3. Elopement. Mughal, about 1606

*The Nawab of Rampur, Rampur*

shot an exceptional tiger or lion he had it measured and painted. In his *Tuzuk* he tells how Nurjahan shot four tigers with five shots from the howdah of an elephant. Though hunting is a common theme of Indian painting, Jahangir's are among the most remarkable of the type. Their element of suspense and drama places them among masterpieces of Mughal painting. Plate 2 is a fine example of such a scene.

Jahangir was also a practicing scientist. When he shot game, birds or animals he had them dissected to find out what they had eaten. (If the contents seemed disagreeable he did not eat the flesh.) His curiosity extended to human anatomy and physiology. As a result, one of the most curious paintings executed under his orders is that of his servant Inayat Khan. Inayat Khan was addicted to opium and drinking and had been reduced to a bundle of bones. When he came to take leave of Jahangir for departure to Agra he was on the verge of death. "He appeared so low and weak that I was astonished," observes Jahangir. "He was skin drawn over bones. Or rather his bones, too, had dissolved. Though painters have striven much in drawing an emaciated face, yet I have never seen anything like this, nor even approaching to it. Good God, can a son of man come to such a shape and fashion? . . . As it was a very extraordinary case I directed painters to take his portrait."<sup>4</sup> The painting, which is in the Bodleian at Oxford, is a remarkable study of the symptoms of death.

Portraits, whether of individuals or groups in durbar or other court scenes, were encouraged by Jahangir. His most talented portrait painters were Abul Hasan, whom he calls "wonder of the age," and Bishan Das, whom he describes as "unequalled in his age for taking likenesses." The Emperor's judgment was good, a quality of which he was not unaware. "My liking for painting and my practice in judging it have arrived at such a point that when any work is brought before me, either of deceased artists or of those of the present day, without the names being told me, I say on the spur of the moment that it is the work of such and such a man. And if there be a picture containing many portraits, and each face be the work of a different master, I can discover which face is the work of each of them. If any other person has put in the eye and eyebrow of a face, I can perceive whose work the original face is, and who has painted the eye and eyebrows."<sup>5</sup>

In the paintings of the Jahangir period, European influence is evident. The Jesuit missionaries who came to Fatehpur-Sikri in 1579 had presented Akbar with a picture of the Madonna which he hung in a place of honor in his private room in his palace. A year later they gave him a Bible illustrated with engravings by Flemish artists of the school of Quentin Matsys (ca. 1466-1530). Among the engravings were pictorial maps depicting mediaeval ships. The Mughal artists had not seen the sea and ships, and they avidly copied these from the engravings. Kesu, an artist of Akbar, copied Christian pictures and presented an album of them to the Emperor in 1588.

Under Jahangir this association with Western painting increased. He wore, it is said, a locket containing miniatures of Jesus and Mary around his neck. Sir Thomas

<sup>4</sup>*Tuzuk*, Vol. II, pp. 43-44.

<sup>5</sup>*Tuzuk*, Vol. II, pp. 20-21.



Plate 4. Lovers. Mughal, about 1625  
*The Maharaja of Jaipur, Jaipur Museum*

Roe, the British ambassador, gave him a number of paintings by British artists in 1617 and was embarrassed when he could not explain to the oriental recipients the meaning of some of them, especially one entitled "Venus and the Satyre."<sup>6</sup>

In the portraits of Jahangir we see for the first time the nimbus painted behind his head. This, a symbol of the sun, originated in Persia with sun worship. It was adopted by the Buddhist artists in Mahayana Buddhism for the Buddha and the saints. Eventually it was accepted by the Byzantine church and was utilized extensively in the Christian art of the Middle Ages. Finally, it appears, this symbol traveled back to India with the European paintings presented to Jahangir, and he had his own artists adopt it for his portraits. Nimbused cherubims and winged figures were also adopted from European paintings by the Mughal painters. The use of these symbols on the top of the paintings became common during the subsequent reign of Shah Jahan. Linear and aerial perspective, the use of shadows, and landscapes in the background of paintings are other signs of European influence.

During Jahangir's time albums of paintings, in contrast to illuminated and illustrated books, became fashionable. Some of the paintings have exquisite borders of floral arabesques painted in gold. Sometimes figures of birds and animals and even elaborate landscapes are introduced in the borders.

A charming painting dating to the Jahangir period in the Library of the Nawab of Rampur shows an elopement scene, and we reproduce it in Plate 3. The lover enters the house of his sweetheart in the dead of night when the servants and guards are fast asleep. Two horses are tethered under a tree outside the house. The garden pavilion in which the girl has been sleeping is an interesting structure. On its walls are niches, cut in a variety of shapes, painted red, green, yellow and blue, in which are porcelain vases, flasks, cups and saucers. In the garden are plantains and flowering peaches. Dressed in a scarlet frock and blue-green trousers, the girl looks most compelling. One can feel the hushed silence of the night and all but hear the tense beating of the girl's heart as she prepares to depart with her lover.

In a painting of the late Jahangir period, a young noble is making love to his sweetheart. It is night in the month of April; the dark sky is powdered with stars. A candle fixed in a stand is burning in a corner. On a small bed table, are two colored flasks and grapes and oranges. The serenity and joyful and sensuous abandon of such lovers was described by D. H. Lawrence:

So I hope I shall spend eternity  
With my face down buried between her breasts;  
And my still heart full of security,  
And my still hands full of her breasts.<sup>7</sup>

The painting is an example of the most sensuous of the Jahangir period, and we show it in Plate 4.

<sup>6</sup>Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals* (London, 1924), p. 171.

<sup>7</sup>D. H. Lawrence, "Song of a Man Who Is Loved," *Collected Poems* (New York, 1964), Vol. I.



The Taj Mahal, Agra

## CHAPTER V

### SHAH JAHAN AND AURANGZEB: MATURITY AND DECLINE

**S**HAH JAHAN became the Emperor of India in 1627. He was a handsome man with a sensitive face and a pointed, trimmed beard. Nobles in the durbar pictures promptly became bearded in resemblance to the Emperor.

During Shah Jahan's reign, more travelers came to India from Europe for trade, adventure, employment, or out of the curiosity that has so long sent men to the East. Among the latter were two Frenchmen, François Bernier, a doctor by profession, and Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a jeweler, and an Italian, Niccolao Manucci. (Manucci left Venice in 1653 at the age of fourteen as a stowaway, and reached India in 1656. He took service under Prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan.) From these visitors we have a greatly improved account of life in India as compared with that

of the Indian historians of the time, who were too close to the events, too committed to the rulers or too afraid of them.

Shah Jahan was, without close rival, the most accomplished builder between the Italian Renaissance and the present. No one touched so many buildings with such magic. In 1631, as all the world knows, he suffered the great sorrow of his life, when his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal died in childbirth. In the following year he started work on the world's noblest mausoleum in her memory, the Taj Mahal. It was completed in 1647 at a cost of 41 million rupees. It remains to this day the most admired single structure of the modern world.

Shah Jahan's example was followed in turn by his nobles, and this explains the large number of tombs of this period in the vicinity of Delhi and Agra. Tavernier mentions that there was not one of the eunuchs in the king's harem who did not yearn for a magnificent tomb for himself. The Taj Mahal was but one of Shah Jahan's masterworks. He restored the importance of Delhi by building the Red Fort—red for its sandstone walls—which enclosed his palace, and the Pearl Mosque. Indeed, the present-day city of Delhi owes its existence to Shah Jahan and was named Shahjahanabad for him. With its tall, chaste walls marching into the distance, the Red Fort combines majesty and strength with serenity. The tiny mosque, built entirely of marble with pearly colonnades, is a delicate gem.

Apart from being the royal residence, the Red Fort was also the artistic capital. In the east wall was the Naqar Khana, which sheltered a band consisting of drums and trumpets. Here everyone of less than princely rank was required to dismount. He came then to the Hall of Public Audience with numerous columns and engrailed arches. Farther along is the Diwan-i-khas, the Hall of Private Audience. Here was the Peacock Throne, named for its two peacocks with tails expanded into gigantic fans at the back. The peacocks were inlaid with rubies, emeralds, sapphires, pearls and other precious stones, and had a highly lifelike appearance. The pride of the builder in his creation is told in this exuberant verse engraved on the walls.

If on earth there be an Eden of Bliss,  
It is this! It is this! It is this!

The royal palace was cool and green. The Western Jumna Canal, after passing through the main shopping center of Delhi, Chandni Chowk—the Moon Square—flowed into the fort. It provided irrigation to the extensive gardens, including the Moon Garden and the Life-giving Garden. In these gardens, in turn, were pavilions named for the pleasant rainy months of July and August. And, as a final touch of exceptional elegance, in the water channels were fish with gold rings in their heads, each ring having one ruby and two pearls.

The harem, another elegant feature, contained spacious apartments for the queens and women of lesser rank. At the door of every chamber was a reservoir of running water; on every side were gardens, retreats and fountains and grottoes which

afforded shelter from the heat of the sun. There were also verandas and open terraces for sleeping at night. An octagonal tower, the Musamman Burj, facing the river, was covered with plates of gold and its apartments were decorated with exquisite paintings and magnificent mirrors. A very great deal of this grandeur survives. Had he not built the Taj Mahal, Shah Jahan would be celebrated for the Red Fort.

Shah Jahan patronized music and poetry in Persian and Hindi. One of his favorites was Sundar Das, a Hindi poet who wrote the *Sundar Sringāra*, a book of classification of lovers. It was illustrated in the Mewar style of painting, possibly during the period when as Prince Khurram, Shah Jahan lived as a guest of the Rana of Mewar in one of the island palaces which also survive to delight the modern visitor to Udaipur. (American readers will remember seeing films of Mrs. John F. Kennedy's visit in 1962 to what is still called Shah Jahan's island.) Another poet, Chintamani, composed a version of the *Ramayana*, and one Dev Dutt wrote a play and a treatise on rhetoric and prosody. Shah Jahan's special favorite was a Vaishnavite Brahman named Jagannath, who wrote a book of erotic poetry known as the *Rasagangadhar*. Jagannath seems to have enjoyed lifelong patronage of the Emperor and to have led a happy life at his court. He fell in love with a beautiful Muslim girl, whom he subsequently married, not heeding the protests made by his co-religionists. It was she who inspired the poetry of the *Rasagangadhar*.

Manucci has left an interesting account of the private life of Shah Jahan and his nobles. Love was a preoccupation not alone of their poetry. "The intimacy of Shah Jahan with the wives of Ja'far Khan and Khalilullah Khan [two of his nobles] was so notorious," says Manucci, "that when they went to court the mendicants called out in loud voices to Ja'far Khan's wife: 'O Breakfast of Shahjahan! remember us!' And when the wife of Khalilullah Khan went by they shouted: 'O Luncheon of Shahjahan! succour us!'"<sup>1</sup> The women had no difficulty grasping the allusion, took it as a compliment, and ordered alms to be given. As the mistress of Shah Jahan, the wife of Jafar Khan moved about in a palanquin covered with a gold-embroidered cloth. Surrounding the palanquin were eunuchs carrying fly-whisks of peacock feathers stuck into handles of enameled gold work. In front were menservants carrying sticks plated with gold or silver, and shouting and pushing people to clear the way. To be the mistress of Shah Jahan was a very good thing.

However, it was not a highly exclusive post. "It would seem as if the only thing Shah Jahan cared for was the search for women to serve his pleasure," reported Manucci.

For this end he established a fair at his court, which lasted eight days every year. No one was allowed to enter except women of all ranks—that is to say, great and small, rich and poor, but all handsome. Each one brought what merchandise she

<sup>1</sup>Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, or Mogul India, 1653-1708*, translated by William Irvine (London, 1906), Vol. I, p. 194.

could. But the best piece of goods she could produce was her own body. Their only object was that the king might fall in love with them; thus honourable women would not go to the place. In those eight days the king visited the stalls twice every day, seated on a small throne carried by several Tartar women, surrounded by several matrons, who walked with their sticks of enamelled gold in their hands, and many eunuchs, all brokers for the subsequent bargaining; there were also a set of women musicians.

Shahjahan moves past with his attention fixed, and seeing any seller that attracted his fancy, he goes up to the stall, and making a polite speech, selects some of the things, and orders whatever she asks for them to be paid to her. Then the king gives an agreed-on signal, and having passed on, the matrons, well versed in these matters, take care that they get her; and in due time she is produced in the royal presence. Many of them come out of the palace very rich and satisfied, while others continue to dwell there with the dignity of concubines. These eight days were observed in the palace with great festivity, dancing, music, acting, and other amusements. The fortress remained shut, with no man inside but the king.

For the greater satisfaction of his lusts Shahjahan ordered the erection of a large hall, twenty cubits long and eight cubits wide, adorned throughout with great mirrors. The gold alone cost fifteen millions of rupees, not including the enamel work and precious stones, of which no account was kept. On the ceiling of the said hall, between one mirror and another, were strips of gold richly ornamented with jewels. At the corners of the mirrors hung great clusters of pearls, and the walls were of jasper stone. [Manucci concludes censoriously] All this expenditure was made so that he might obscenely observe himself and his favourite women.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from his delight in lovely women, one of Shah Jahan's chief amusements was watching elephant fights that were arranged on the strip of land between the Red Fort and the river Jumna. (The river forms one side of the great structure.) The king sat in a window overlooking the arena, while the ladies watched through the trellis screens. Between two elephants was a mud wall about three feet wide and six feet high. Coaxed by their drivers, who were armed with iron hooks, the elephants rushed at each other, colliding like military tanks, their enormous skulls striking with great force, and inflicted dreadful wounds with their tusks and trunks. In the last stage of the fight the mud wall was thrown down and the stronger elephant chased his opponent, putting him to flight. On occasion the elephants were so much entangled that they could be separated only by exploding fireworks between them. Elephant fights and men controlling *mast* elephants with fireworks and spears are shown in a number of paintings of the Shah Jahan period.

<sup>2</sup>*Storia do Mogor*, Vol. I, pp. 195, 194-195.

A common theme with the Mughal artists from the last quarter of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century is that of a young lady standing under a willow tree holding a branch. It is a symbol of frustrated love, for this was an occupational hazard of the court. The Mughal princesses were not allowed to marry lest state affairs be muddled by ambitious sons-in-law. So they pined for their lovers or, on occasion, found clandestine satisfaction. Jahanara Begum, the favorite daughter of Shah Jahan from Mumtaz Mahal of the Taj, was described on account of her beauty as "the rose of her race." The course of her love affair is thus narrated by Bernier.

... although confined in a Seraglio, and guarded like other women, [Jahanara] received the visits of a young man of no very exalted rank, but of an agreeable person. It was scarcely possible, surrounded as she was on all sides by those of her own sex whose envy she had long provoked, that her conduct should escape detection. Shah Jahan was apprised of her guilt, and resolved to enter her apartments at an unusual and unexpected hour. The intimation of his approach was too sudden to allow the choice of more than one place of concealment. The affrighted gallant sought refuge in the capacious cauldron used for the baths. The King's countenance denoted neither surprise nor displeasure; he discoursed with his daughter on ordinary topics, but finished the conversation by observing that the state of her skin indicated a neglect of her customary ablutions, and that it was proper she should bathe. He then commanded the eunuchs to light a fire under the cauldron, and did not retire until they gave him to understand that his wretched victim was no more.<sup>3</sup>

The lover showed his devotion by going through this difficult ordeal calmly without uttering a cry.

Some years later Jahanara, whose affection was not without peril to those involved, fell in love with a handsome Persian youth, Nazar Khan, whom she employed as her steward. When he learned about it, "As a mark of distinguished favour the king presented the betel, in the presence of the whole court, to the unsuspecting youth, which he was obliged immediately to masticate, agreeably to the custom of the country. Betel is a small parcel made of aromatic leaves and other ingredients mixed up with a little of the lime made from sea-shells, this colours the lips and mouth red and agreeably perfumes the breath. Little did the unhappy lover imagine that he had received poison from the hand of the smiling Monarch, but indulging in dreams of future bliss, he withdrew from the palace, and ascended his *paleky* [palanquin]. Such, however, was the activity of the poison, that he died before he could reach home."<sup>4</sup> However, Jahanara was a benign influence in the Mughal court, at least among those who did not risk her love. She helped the distressed, remedied misunderstand-

<sup>3</sup>François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, rev. ed., based on Irving Brock's translation, by Archibald Constable (London, 1891), pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup>*Travels*, pp. 13-14.

ings and assuaged the anger of the Emperor, thus saving many people from harsh treatment.

Misfortune was not confined to Jahanara's lovers. Her younger sister Raushanara, during the reign of their brother Aurangzeb, was involved in a similar episode which also casts light on palace customs and pastimes. Bernier tells the story. ". . . exactly as I heard it from the mouth of an old woman, a half-caste Portuguese, who has been many years a slave in the seraglio, and possesses the privilege of going in and out at pleasure." Raushanara, after having secretly enjoyed the company of a young man for several days "committed him to the care of her female attendants, who promised to conduct their charge out of the seraglio under cover of the night. But whether they were detected, or only dreaded a discovery, or whatever else was the reason, the women fled, and left the terrified youth to wander alone about the gardens: here he was found, and taken before *Aureng-Zebe* who, when he had interrogated him very closely, without being able to draw any other confession of guilt from him than that he had scaled the walls, decided that he should be compelled to leave the seraglio in the same manner. But the eunuchs, it is probable, exceeded their master's instructions, for they threw the culprit from the top of the wall to the bottom."<sup>5</sup>

From the reign of Jahangir onward the relations of the Mughal emperors with the kings of Persia were strained by the dispute over Kandahar, a territory on the borders of the two kingdoms. The etiquette at the Mughal court required that an ambassador who came to meet the Mughal emperor should bend thrice, touching his forehead with the right hand each time. This a proud and tactless ambassador, sent by the Shah, refused to do. Every time he visited the court he would stand erect, saluting in the Persian manner with his hand touching the forehead. According to Bernier, Shah Jahan attempted to deal with the unbending ambassador by having the main entrance of the court leading to the audience hall closed and the wicket only left open. The wicket was so low that a person could not pass through without stooping. However, the ambassador, also a resourceful man, entered the wicket with his back turned toward the king; Shah Jahan said to him indignantly, "Ah, wretch! Didst thou imagine thou wast entering a stable of asses like thyself?" "I did imagine it," replied the ambassador with equal diplomatic nicety. "Who, on going through such a door, can believe he is visiting any but asses?"<sup>6</sup> But the power of the artist is transcendent. The arrogant Persian is shown in one of the durbar paintings of the period saluting the Emperor in an appropriate manner.

Shah Jahan reduced the number of artists in the service of the court, retaining the most talented. The surplus found employment with the nobles and served their vanity by making a great many portraits. Apart from these two distinguished categories of artists, a third group, more in the nature of artisans, were employed in work-

<sup>5</sup> *Travels*, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> *Travels*, pp. 151-152.



Plate 5. Shah Jahan hunting lions. From the *Shahjahan-nama*. Mughal, 1657  
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Windsor Castle

shops along with embroiderers and goldsmiths. They were responsible for the mass production of paintings of no particular merit, many of which have found their way into modern collections.

Like his predecessors, Shah Jahan was fond of hunting and this was a favorite theme of his artists. At this time lions were more common in northern and central India than tigers. When the Emperor planned to go out hunting, huntsmen were sent in advance to locate the quarry. Once spotted, cows, buffaloes, sheep and goats were let loose in the jungle. These kept the lions in position and busy until the royal hunting party arrived. As a further safeguard the jungle was encircled with high nets, leaving only one opening through which the Emperor and the princes mounted on elephants entered armed with matchlocks. All in all, little was left to chance. Plate 5, from the *Shahjahan-nama* in the collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, shows the final result of this unequal contest. Shah Jahan in the upper right is firing at the lion. The latter is roaring aggressively with his tail uplifted, while the lioness with two cubs is moving to escape, though not without a last angry snarl. Outside the net stand a number of armed soldiers watching the proceedings with moderate alarm. The human figures, animal studies and foliage are all wonderfully executed.

Portraits and durbar scenes were popular with the artists of Shah Jahan, chief among whom were Muhammad Faqirullah Khan, Mir Hashim, Muhammad Nadir, Bichitr, Chitarman, Anupchhatar, Manohar, and Honhar. Portraiture was especially good. Some portraits have highly ornamented borders decorated with figures of men, plants and animals; those of Shah Jahan are gorgeously nimbused. There are splendid durbar scenes of the Emperor on a dais or the Peacock Throne.

One such durbar scene from the *Shahjahan-nama*, Plate 6, shows Shah Jahan being weighed against bags of gold. This opulent ceremony was performed annually on the birthday of the Emperor and the gold was then distributed in charity to the poor. Delhi by now was a great imperial city renowned for its brilliant court and wealth and the capital of a well-established empire that was as proud of its literary and artistic fame as of its martial prowess. The scene is laid in the Hall of Public Audience. In the foreground are the nobles sumptuously dressed in silk and muslin coats and wearing embroidered sashes at the waist but standing barefooted on a floral carpet to show their profound humility. In front of the Emperor are two of his sons wearing pearl ropes on their necks and turbans. In the lower corner, a group of mullahs have their hands outstretched in benediction. The portraiture of the faces is superb. All show deep reverence for the Emperor, wealthiest of the Mughals, who was addressed as "The King of the world," "The asylum of the nations," "The ornament of the world," "The King of Kings." Indeed, this painting shows the Mughal court at the acme of its splendor.

Painting achieved a new delicacy and romantic flavor in the reign of Shah Jahan. The rulers were no longer barbarians from beyond the mountains; painting



Plate 6. Shah Jahan being weighed against gold. From the *Shahjahan-nama*. Mughal, 1657  
*Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Windsor Castle*

reflected the warm sensuousness of India. Since it was a period of comparative peace, and the Mughal empire was confident of its security and power, themes of warfare and bloodshed disappeared. In their place came courtly splendor and magnificence, love and romance. The artists portrayed the romances of Laila and Majnu, Khusru and Shirin, Kamrup and Kamalata and of Rupmati and Baz Bahadur riding by night. Plate 7 is a fine depiction of Rupmati and Baz Bahadur. It is possible—no one can be dogmatic on the matter of dates—that it is from a somewhat later period. The identity of the lovers is not in doubt.

It was, to repeat, an age of pleasure and calm. Other paintings showed princesses in transparent muslin blouses seated on terraces surrounded by their female servants listening to music. Plate 8 is of such an idyll. Often the prince is present and making love to his favorite. As with most such periods of tranquillity, men soon found a way to bring it to an end.

Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, was a liberal-minded prince with an inquiring mind. He associated with Hindu scholars, Muslim pantheists and Christian theologians. He had the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* translated into Persian. So interested was he in Christian religious thought that it was commonly believed he would become a convert. Like his father he was a discerning patron of painting, and the album of paintings bearing his name, which is now in the India Office Library in London, testifies to his patronage and good taste. He was fond of music and dancing and once fell in love with a Hindu dancing girl (i.e., courtesan) named Rana-dil, whom he married. It was not necessarily a dangerous choice; these girls regularly reformed to become loyal, as well as accomplished, wives.

Dara Shikoh was defeated in battle by Aurangzeb, another son of Shah Jahan, and later executed. The wives of a defeated prince were spoils of war. Aurangzeb sent for his brother's two wives, Udepuri, a Georgian by race, and Rana-dil, and asked them to enter his harem. Udepuri obeyed. "But Ra'na-dil," as Manucci tells,

sent to ask the king why he wanted to see her. They answered her that the king wished to take her to wife, since the law thus directed that the wives of a dead elder brother belonged to the living younger brother. On hearing this reply, she sent to inquire with what in her was he enamoured. The king sent word that he had an affection for her lovely hair. Owing to this answer, she cut off her hair and sent it to Aurangzeb, saying that here was the beauty that he longed for, while she wished to live in solitude. But Aurangzeb, who wanted to marry her, sent once more to say that her beauty was great, that he would count her as one of his wives. She ought to assume that he was that same Dara. Not one point should be omitted in the pre-eminence due to a queen, nor in her rights as sovereign lady, being, as she was, wife of his brother.

But the brave Ra'na-dil went into her apartments, and taking a knife,



Plate 7. Baz Bahadur and Rupmati riding by night. Mughal, 1650 or later. *Punjab Museum, Chandigarh*

slashed her face all over, and collecting the blood in a cloth, sent it to Aurangzeb, saying that if he sought the beauty of her face it was now undone, and if her blood gratified him he was welcome. Encountering such resolution, Aurangzeb ceased his solicitations, yielding high esteem to her, and treating her with the courtesy deserved by her constancy.<sup>7</sup>

The affection of Rana-dil for Dara is celebrated in Plate 9. They are shown holding hands in a garden by the side of a lake. One attendant pours wine. Another provides music. The sky is decorated by a moon with a splendid halo. Their love deserved a better fate.

After deposing his aged father, Shah Jahan (whom he confined in the Agra fort in an apartment with a distant view of the Taj Mahal), and liquidating Dara and another brother, Aurangzeb became the Emperor of India in 1658. He was an able, vigorous and, as this statecraft suggests, also a determined man. But he had learned nothing from his liberal predecessors. An orthodox Muslim, he saw no reason for the existence of other creeds. Accordingly, he gave up all customs and ceremonies which savored of Hinduism. On his birthday, he was no longer weighed against gold and silver for distribution among the poor. The custom of applying sandal paste to the foreheads of Hindu rajas when investing them was abandoned. In the morning the emperor no longer showed himself at the palace window in the ceremony called *jharokha darshan*. Forced conversions and economic discrimination were used to win converts to Islam. History records the efficiency of these techniques—it is possible that over all time more men have been compelled than persuaded to true faith as variously defined. But the conversions aroused antagonism among the Hindus, as did Aurangzeb's poll tax. The Rajputs, the sword arm of his predecessors, became his deadly enemies.

Aurangzeb was also highly suspicious of his own subordinates, and this lack of trust led to deterioration in administration. He sought to do everything himself or, failing this, he gave highly detailed instructions to his governors. The latter, in turn, lost initiative, and became hesitant and helpless when any unexpected situation arose. Then Aurangzeb complained of the lack of able officers as compared with the days of his illustrious predecessors. However, he was not entirely wanting in wise advice. His Chief Minister Saadullah Khan told him, "No age is wanting in able men; it is the business of wise masters to find them out, win them over, and get work done by means of them, without listening to the calumnies of selfish men against them."<sup>8</sup>

Relations with Persia deteriorated further during the reign of Aurangzeb; among other things the Persians took exception to the unreticent title of Alamgir, or Holder of the World, which Aurangzeb had assumed. The consequence was another

<sup>7</sup>*Storia do Mogor*, Vol. I, p. 361.

<sup>8</sup>William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, edited by Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta, n.d.), Vol. I, p. 311.



Plate 8. Ladies listening to music. Mughal, about 1658  
*Punjab Museum, Chandigarh*

candid episode in the history of diplomacy. Aurangzeb received the ambassador of Abbas II of Persia with great outward courtesy and commanded that the ambassador should be clad, in his presence, with a vest of brocade, a turban, and a silken sash embroidered with gold and silver. He received in turn twenty-five horses, with trappings of embroidered brocade; twenty highly bred camels, a number of cases containing rose-water; six carpets of extraordinary size and beauty; pieces of brocade; and cutlasses, and poniards covered with precious stones. So far things had gone well.

But Aurangzeb's ambassador, who went to Persia in return, had formerly served under Shah Jahan. He carried a letter to Shah Abbas II boasting of his new master's achievements and advising that the latter needed no human aid since God was his helper. According to Tavernier, after the customary salutations were over, Shah Abbas told the ambassador with angry countenance and admirable clarity, "Thou art then a villain . . . to have abandoned thy King in his need after so many favours, and to serve a tyrant who keeps his father in prison; and has murdered his brothers and nephews. How is it . . . that he [Aurangzeb] dares to assume the stately titles of Alamgir, Aurang Shah. of King who holds the universe in his hand, since he has yet conquered nothing and all he possesses is derived from murders and treason? Is it possible . . . that thou art one of those who have counselled him to the shedding of so much blood, to be executioner of his brothers, and to hold his father in prison; thou who has acknowledged to having received so much honour and so many benefits? Thou art not worthy . . . to possess the beard that thou wearest."<sup>9</sup>

He then suited action to word and ordered that the ambassadorial beard be shaved. No greater affront could be offered a man in that country and of that religion. It must be assumed that diplomatic ties were not strengthened.

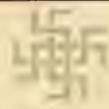
Art and culture rarely go well with religious intolerance. The reign of Aurangzeb was no exception. He launched a campaign for the destruction of temples, and all over India many fine sculptures were destroyed or mutilated. Even the two statues of elephants with their riders which guarded the main gateway to the Red Fort at Delhi were destroyed. Mural paintings showing Christian themes in Akbar's tomb at Sikandra were whitewashed. After the conquest of Bijapur the pictures at the Asar Mahal were defaced. Poets he called lying flatterers and their poetry vain babblings. Even music was not tolerated. Art and architecture rapidly declined, and India became a cultural desert in which only the austere mullahs flourished. In his declining years Aurangzeb may have relented to some extent, for there are paintings in which he is shown as a bearded old man hunting, guiding the siege of Bijapur or holding a Quran in his hand.

The reign of Aurangzeb is relieved, however, by the solitary figure of Zeb-un-nisa, his eldest daughter. She was a poetess and a scholar, and a patron of literature. Gifted with a remarkable memory, she memorized the entire Quran. She

<sup>9</sup>Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, translated by V. Ball (London, 1889), Vol. I, p. 375.



Plate 9. Prince Dara Shikoh and Rana-dil. Mughal, about 1658  
*The Maharaja of Jaipur, Jaipur Museum*



employed scholars to write books, and calligraphers to copy old manuscripts and her library surpassed all other private collections of the age. She was accomplished also in love. While riding around the walls of the palace on the pretext of keeping watch, Aqil Khan, the governor of Lahore, a brave and a handsome man, who was also a poet, saw her standing on the housetop. She was slim and petite and dressed in a robe of the color of the flower of the pomegranate. His poetic talents were aroused and he recited, "A vision in red appears on the roof of the palace." She answered, completing the couplet, "Supplication nor force nor gold can win her." Later Zeb-un-nisa was laying out a garden in the palace. Aqil entered disguised as a mason, and again they exchanged verses. However, it is supposed that Aqil ultimately met the same sad fate of the other lovers of the Mughal princesses. And in 1681 Zeb-un-nisa was accused by Aurangzeb of complicity in the rebellion of the latter's son Akbar. She was lodged in the fort of Salimgarh in Delhi, where she lived till her death in 1702. Her tomb, in an early manifestation of progress, was eventually demolished to make way for a railway line. However, a sorrowing Zeb-un-nisa standing under a tree survives in a number of Mughal paintings from the early eighteenth century.

Some nobles with a taste for pictures also gave secret patronage to painters during Aurangzeb's reign. Thévenot, a French traveler who visited Agra and Delhi in 1666, remarks that the artists of Agra painted lascivious pictures which "few civil Europeans" would buy. This was not, however, mere pornography of a kind that might shock a visiting Parisian. It was inspired by the *Kama Sutra* in a tradition that continued in all Indian centers of painting and flourished in Rajasthan. According to Thévenot, the artists of Delhi also painted portraits and battles and victories of their princes. He says, though, that "they were not much encouraged and for lack of encouragement, they did not take much pains in their work and produced just as much as enabled them to keep alive."<sup>10</sup> This is confirmed by Bernier, who states that art had now fallen on evil days. There were gains elsewhere however. Artists migrated to Hyderabad in the Deccan and to the Hindu states of Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills in search of new patrons. They carried with them the Mughal tradition and were to bring it to bear brilliantly on the scenes and themes of the distant courts where they now found shelter.

<sup>10</sup>Jean de Thévenot, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, edited by Surendranath Sen (New Delhi, 1949), pp. 55, 65.



The Red Fort, Delhi

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LAST PHASE

THE MUGHAL CIVILIZATION flashed its wings once more before its death. From 1707, when the hostile hand of Aurangzeb was at last removed from India's cultural life, until 1739, art and culture revived for one last moment. The revival began with Bahadur Shah, who came to the Peacock Throne in 1707. He was generous and a patron of learning and he promptly restored court patronage of painting. The magnificent *Shahjahan-nama*, now in the collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, was painted for him. In refinement, skill and artistic sense it shows Mughal painting at its best. Under Bahadur Shah the magnificence of the Mughal court also revived—the luxury of the court and nobles contrasting ever more sharply with the poverty of the masses. An earlier glimpse of Mughal affluence can be had from the

way the princesses traveled. In the city they were carried in gilded and painted palanquins. These were covered with magnificent silk nets of many colors, ornamented with precious stones or pieces of mirrors, and enriched with embroidery, fringes and tassels. The surroundings not being always savory, servants carried perfumes near the palanquins. More liveried attendants ran alongside carrying silver- and gold-plated staffs, shouting the rank and titles of the princess and exhorting the people in the streets to keep off. The beggars were not so easily discouraged, however. Responding to their own imperatives, they gathered like flies and clamored for alms in the name of Allah. Following the palanquin of each princess were those of her ladies-in-waiting surrounded by armed retainers. In the rear were bullock carriages carrying women servants and slaves.

For longer distances elephants were used. "The ladies are . . . carried on the backs of elephants, which upon these occasions wear massive bells of silver, and are decked with costly trappings, curiously embroidered. These lovely and distinguished females, seated in Mikdembers, are thus elevated above the earth, like so many superior beings borne along through the middle region of the air. Each Mikdember contains eight women, four on a side: it is latticed and covered with a silken net . . . if I had not regarded this display of magnificence with a sort of philosophical indifference, I should have been apt to be carried away by such flights of imagination as inspire most of the Indian poets, when they represent the elephants as conveying so many goddesses concealed from the vulgar gaze."<sup>1</sup>

The Mughal empire fell partly because the rule of primogeniture had no standing in the selection of successors to the throne. As a result, when the Emperor died, and in some cases before, there was a fratricidal war among his sons. In this struggle the fittest did not always survive. Ruthlessness, cunning and hypocrisy were, on the whole, more useful. So the art of filial and brotherly destruction which Aurangzeb had fostered was continued by his less able successors with disastrous results.

Jahandar Shah succeeded Bahadur Shah in 1712 and ruled for eleven months. He was a profligate and a sot and the least worthy of the occupants of the Peacock Throne. He celebrated his accession by ordering grand illuminations three times every month. So much oil was used that it became exceedingly scarce. He then substituted clarified butter, and that too became scarce. Soon there was nothing more to burn.

Meanwhile he had raised nepotism to a remarkable level. After a dancing girl, Lal Kunwar by name, became his wife and was given the title of Imtiyaz Mahal, "Chosen of the Palace," all her relations, fiddlers and drummers, were made nobles. Her brothers were granted the princely right of the use of kettledrums when on march. For their residence they were given the finest mansions in the city, which had been confiscated from less tractable nobles.

The Mughals had a system of selling the governments of the states for cash.

<sup>1</sup>François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, rev. ed., based on Irving Brock's translation, by Archibald Constable (London, 1891), pp. 372-373.

Since the costs of position were high and the profits modest, the governors selected borrowed the necessary money at ruinous rates of interest. Their maintenance costs were high too; they had to make valuable presents every year to the king, the chief minister and to the eunuchs of the harem, whose influence at the court was also considered useful. So the governors perforce squeezed the people in turn. Not much remained. Jahandar Shah, who had high regard for musicians, appointed Niamat Khan, a master musician, Governor of Multan. There was delay in the issue of the order of appointment. When an inquiry was made Zulfiqar Khan, the Chief Minister, replied "that it was a well-known rule of every public office to issue no patent without a fee in cash. As he wished to be obliging, he would not ask for cash, but since he had need of them, would take instead one thousand guitars . . . [Niamat Khan] worked his hardest and in a week sent as many as two hundred guitars to Zulfiqar Khan. The Wazir insisted upon delivery of the full number. Niamat Khan complained to His Majesty of the excessive bribe demanded from him. Jahandar Shah, when next he saw the Wazir, asked him the reason of collecting so many guitars. The answer was that when musicians were sent to govern provinces, nobles must discard their weapons and learn to play on the guitar."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Jahandar Shah was not without democratic instincts of a sort. Accompanied by Lal Kunwar in a bullock carriage, he used to visit the market for shopping. One day they had a drinking bout at the house of the spirit seller. On reaching the palace, Lal Kunwar was taken out by her attendants. The driver, who also had partaken liberally, left the carriage in the stable without examining it. Eventually the king's absence was noticed and a search was made. He had been overlooked and left in the carriage. It was with reference to Jahandar Shah that Khush-hal Chand quotes, "A drunken man is so happy that at the Resurrection he asks 'Who am I, who are you, and what place is this?'"<sup>3</sup>

When he was defeated by his nephew Farrukhsiyar (1712–1719), Jahandar Shah was imprisoned and put in the fort, where, on his request, Lal Kunwar joined him. He was later assassinated and Lal Kunwar was sent to Suhagpura, or Hamlet of Happy Wives, as the home of the royal widows was ironically called. Here the widows of the deceased emperors passed their life receiving rations and a monthly allowance. Painting during the brief reign of Jahandar Shah reflected his interests. The main themes were love, music and dance parties, elephant fights and display of fireworks.

The dancing girls, who from the reign of Shah Jahan onward received patronage from the aristocracy of Delhi, included among their number *kanchanis* who were under obligation to attend the court twice a week and perform a dance before the king at a specially assigned place. Regarding *kanchanis* Manucci writes: "This class is more esteemed than others, by reason of their great beauty. When they go to court, to

<sup>2</sup>William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, edited by Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta, n.d.), Vol. I, pp. 193–194.

<sup>3</sup>*Later Mughals*, Vol. I, pp. 195–196.

the number of more than five hundred, they all ride in highly embellished vehicles, and are clothed in rich raiment. All of them appear and dance in the royal presence . . . Ordinarily the dancing women dance in the principal open places in the city, beginning at six o'clock in the evening and going on till nine, lighted by many torches, and from this dancing they earn a good deal of money."<sup>4</sup>

Some of the *kanchanis* were women of culture and great personal charm. In their early years they received education in Persian or Urdu, and were taught music and dancing. Some composed poetry and, like the Urdu poets, added poetic suffixes to their names. Young nobles were often assigned to a girl to learn good manners, rules of etiquette and the pleasures of refined social and other intercourse. They learned to intersperse the chewing of scented betel leaves with whiffs of the hookah and poetry, quips and banter.

During moonlit nights in summer, dance performances were arranged on the open terraces of the houses of nobles and the rich. The terraces were washed with water to cool them, and covered with carpets. The guests reclined on brocade cushions and bolsters. A large number of hookahs decorated with garlands of jasmine were provided for the smokers. Candles fixed in silver candlesticks were lighted. Flasks of home-distilled spirits flavored with spices and containing the essence of meat—usually of male sparrows and cocks—were also at hand.

From ancient Hindu times the chewing of betel leaf had had an important place in the social life of India. The Mughals adopted the practice and organized it in the manner of a modern bureaucracy—there was an Imperial Betel Leaf and Drinks Department in their household administration. The less demanding of the guests contented themselves with scented betel leaves (called pans) covered with gold and silver leaf. For more important guests costly oxides of gold and silver and pearls were added to the pans which were carefully folded and suspended from silver hooks in the betel-leaf caskets. The caskets were then carried around to the guests by a servant. From time to time a servant also sprinkled the clothes of the guests with scented rose water from silver and gold sprinklers, and when it became sultry they generated a mild breeze with large hand fans.

It was in this atmosphere laden with the heavy fragrance of *keora* (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) and rose that dance and music were enjoyed. The dinners that followed were equally exotic—meat pilau, roasted chickens stuffed with raisins and spices, saffron-scented sweet rice, curried quails, kababs, pickles, chutnies of raisins and mangoes and puddings of many varieties were minimum fare. It was consumed to the sound of *tabla* drums and stringed musical instruments shaped like peacocks which are *tanpuras*.

Mughal India was famous for its fine muslins; they were so well regarded that

<sup>4</sup>Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, or Mogul India, 1653-1708*, translated by William Irvine (London, 1906), Vol. I, p. 196.

they were given poetic names such as "woven air" or "morning dew," somewhat reminiscent of modern advertising copy. They were used for long flowing robes worn by the royalty and nobles called *jamas*. Farrukhsiyar was particularly fond of elegant clothes and wore gold-embroidered muslin *jamas* edged with gold lace. These were pleated below the waist and almost reached the ankles, a fashion imitated by the nobles. Elsewhere in Asia the dress was thought effeminate; the Afghans called the Mughals "pale-faced men in petticoats."

The muslins and brocades were the products of palace workshops called *karkhanas* located at Agra, Delhi, Benares, Dacca and Ahmedabad. Toward the close of the seventeenth century, Indian silk taffetas and brocades were exported to Europe. Bernier thus describes the palace workshops of the Maharaja of Benares: "In one hall embroiderers are busily employed, superintended by a master. In another you see the goldsmiths; in a third, painters; in a fourth, varnishers in lacquer-work; in a fifth, joiners, turners, tailors, and shoemakers; in a sixth, manufacturers of silk, brocade, and those fine muslins of which are made turbans, girdles with golden flowers, and drawers worn by females, so delicately fine as frequently to wear out in one night. This article of dress, which lasts only a few hours, may cost ten or twelve crowns, and even more when beautifully embroidered with needlework."<sup>5</sup>

In portraits the elegantly dressed Mughal ladies wear tight-fitting silk pajamas and blouses of transparent silk, and they are draped in fine muslin *dupattas*. The outlines of curves of the body are dimly visible. There is also a tendency to elongate the figure. Paintings of the Farrukhsiyar period, which show these features, have a special place in Mughal painting.

Farrukhsiyar, the new Emperor, had a passion for horses. Several-thousand fine horses, selected for their color and speed, were kept in his stables; a selected few were tethered each night under the balcony window of the room where he slept. He was also fond of polo and of hunting in the imperial preserves around the city of Delhi.

Farrukhsiyar was the last Mughal emperor to marry a Rajput princess. She was Indar Kunwar, a daughter of Maharaja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur. At the marriage, apart from singing and dancing, there was a magnificent display of fireworks. The Rajputs fraternized with their Muslim brethren, and induced them to sip their favorite drink, rose water mixed with sugar and opium. When, in the normal course of events Farrukhsiyar was assassinated four years later, his Rajput queen was made over to her father, who accepted her after a purification ceremony. She gave up her Muslim attire and with a property of ten million rupees returned safely to her native Jodhpur in western India.

The scenes of luxury and enjoyment of the court were popular themes of the painters of this period, but the artists also turned to simpler and more pastoral scenes. In India the village well is the women's club where, apart from pulling water, women

<sup>5</sup> *Travels*, p. 259.

gather for gossip. In paintings from the early eighteenth century, a prince often comes in the form of a cup, and a lovely maiden is pouring water. Occasionally he seems to have forgotten his thirst. It may be a reminder that, according to legend, Akbar, while out hunting in the environs of Delhi, fell in love with a village girl and married her.

Another favorite subject was that of Bhils hunting by night. Bhils are aboriginal tribes of Rajasthan and central India who live by hunting. Usually a man is shooting an arrow at a deer, while his wife, clad only in a skirt of leaves, holds a torch. Some of these paintings are brilliantly alive. The luminous figures of the hunters stand out vividly against the night.

Tobacco smoking, which was introduced by the Portuguese around the close of the sixteenth century, spread steadily throughout India even though it was severely discouraged by Jahangir. In the seventeenth century smoking became a fashion with the rich and is a feature of the painting. From the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries ladies are also commonly shown smoking hookahs.

Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) succeeded Farrukhsiyar. Another pleasure-loving monarch, he was called Rangila, or the Colorful. Women influenced him strongly in the affairs of state. He amused himself in the society of the harem and surrounded himself with buffoons and flatterers. But painting during Muhammad Shah's reign achieved further refinement. Female figures are graceful; trees and other natural objects are drawn with feeling. The *jamas* are fully pleated and almost touch the ground, so that the shoes of the wearer can hardly be seen. Themes of moonlight revels and music parties were frequent. Or a prince on a terrace receives his favorite concubine sumptuously dressed and accompanied by female servants. Keeping of tumbler pigeons was a popular hobby and there are many charming pictures of princesses watching their flight. Or we see princesses reclining on sofas attended by a host of maidservants. One massages the royal feet, another fans the princess's face, another holds a silver jug of water.

Plate 10, which shows a lovelorn princess praying to Shiva, is a fine example of the work of this period. In a corner is the crescent moon relieving the gloom of the night. The princess is distinguished from her attendants by her gloriously nimbused head. It is an example of Mughal art mellowed by the influence of Hinduism. We see here the beginning of the transition to Rajput art of Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills.

A word must now be said about Muslim painting in the south. It is called Deccani painting for the Deccan Plateau. From 1347 to 1527 the Bahmani dynasty named after the founder Bahman Shah ruled over the Deccan. From the ruins of the Bahmani Sultanate arose five kingdoms, namely, the Qutb Shabs of Golconda, the



Plate 10. At a shrine to Shiva. By Fateh Chand. Mughal, about 1735  
*The Maharaja of Jaipur, Jaipur Museum*

Barid Shahs of Bidar, the Imad Shahs of Berar, the Nizam Shahs of Ahmadnagar, and the Adil Shahs of Bijapur. Painting developed in the later half of the sixteenth century in Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda in a parallel with Mughal painting. Like that of the Mughal courts, it was strongly influenced in style as well as technique by Persian painting. Ragamala, a form of painting expressing the Indian modes of music, and portraiture were the favorite themes, and some fine portraits of Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1558–1627) of Bijapur show this corpulent musician king draped in elegantly embroidered muslins.

Dancing scenes are also common in Golconda painting, and in some Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1580–1612) is seen presiding over dance performances. This tradition seemed to have continued for a long time. Tavernier, who visited Golconda during the last years of the rule of Abdullah Qutb Shah (1626–1672), was impressed by the large number of public women in the fortress and the town of Golconda. He liked also their fair countenances, good stature and proportions. He further mentions that those women were so supple and agile that when the king (Abdullah Qutb Shah) paid a visit to Masulipatam, he was specially honored by them. Nine of them very cleverly represented the form of an elephant. Four made the four legs, four others the body and one the trunk. The King, mounted above on a kind of throne, made his entry into the town on this remarkable vehicle. It explains the paintings in all Indian schools of composite groups of women arranged in the form of elephants, horses or even palanquins. On occasion men are introduced for imaginative or acrobatic love-making in one or another part of this confection.

Berar and Bidar were annexed by Ahmadnagar, and, in turn, by Shah Jahan. Bijapur and Golconda were absorbed in the Mughal empire by Aurangzeb. Later on with the decay of the Mughal empire, Asaf Jah, a Mughal noble, carved out the kingdom of Hyderabad which more or less included the territories of the kingdoms of Golconda, Ahmadnagar, Berar and Bidar. Hyderabad became the center of Deccani painting, which was by now strongly influenced by the Mughal style of Delhi.

In 1738 Nadir Shah, the Persian marauder, invaded India and in the following year he defeated Muhammad Shah and occupied Delhi. After a notable massacre of the citizens he relaxed with a dancing girl by the name of Nurbai and ordered that she be handsomely paid and taken to Persia in his train. It was with great difficulty that she saved herself from this mark of favor. Apart from an immense booty of gold, silver, diamonds and pearls and also the Peacock Throne, Nadir Shah returned to Persia with many superb works of art.

On his departure the empire lay in shambles. The spoils were then fought over by Afghans, Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, the rebellious governors and the British. Painting in Delhi received a mortal blow. An exodus of artists took place to Fyzabad, Lucknow, Patna, Murshidabad, Hyderabad and to the Punjab Hills and Rajasthan. During the reign of Muhammad Shah's successors, particularly Shah Alam (1759–

1806), there was mass production of copies of old masterpieces. Even the names of the original artists were copied, and to make the copies seem all the more authentic, royal seals were stamped on them. But the history of Indian painting now passes to the provincial courts. Some of these were large and grand, and some only a small fortress in the hills. The common denominator of each, where they flourished, was a prince who understood, loved and hence encouraged the painters.



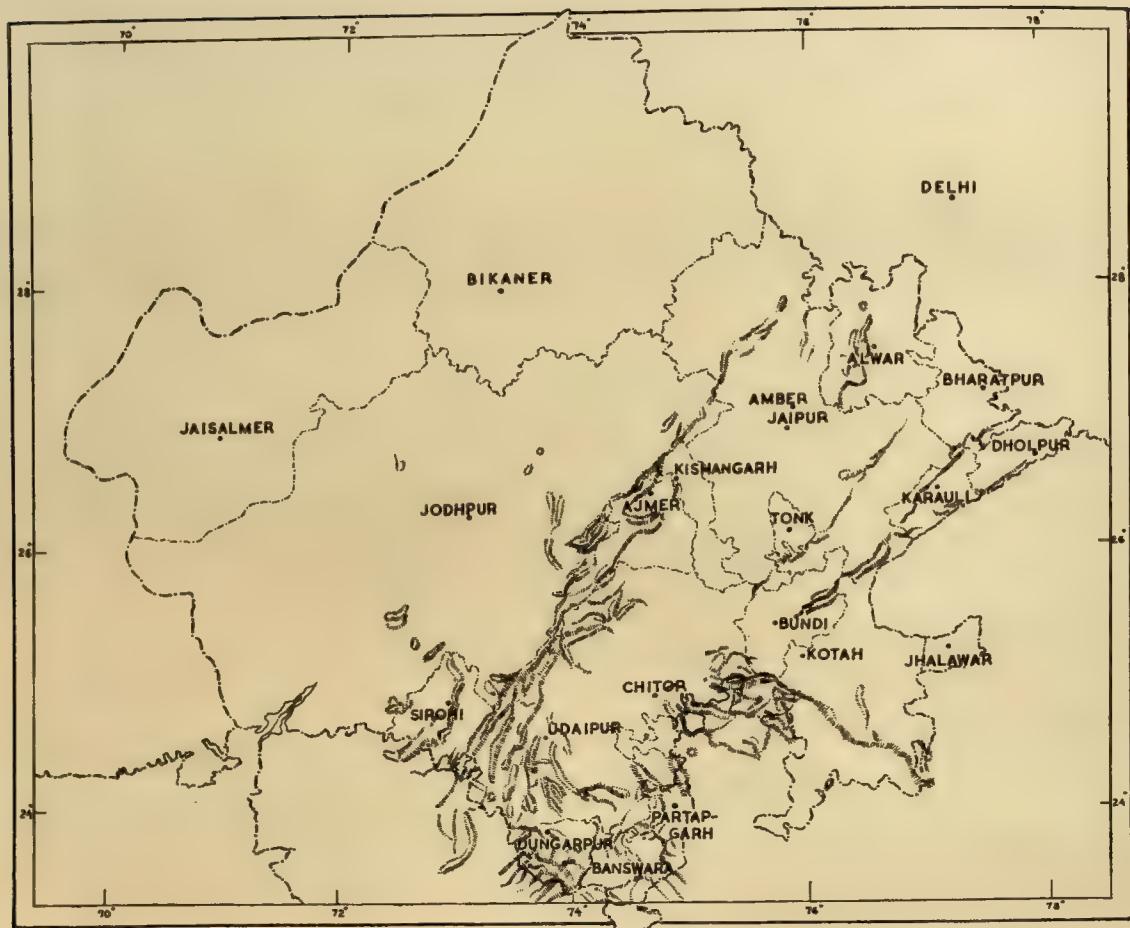
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## CHAPTER VII

### RAJPUT PAINTING

**R**AJASTHAN, the land of Rajputs and Jats, is the westernmost state of India. It is about the area of New Mexico and has a population of twenty millions. It owes its present existence to the merger at the time of Indian independence of eighteen native or princely states, two chiefships, and the district of Ajmer-Merwara. The principal states were Mewar (Udaipur), Marwar (Jodhpur), Amber (Jaipur), Bikaner, Kotah, Bundi and Kishangarh. All were famous for their painters and painting.

Though it is one state, Rajasthan is two regions. North and west of the Aravalli hills are the erstwhile desert kingdoms of Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur. This largely arid land includes the Great Indian Desert, with long ranges of sand dunes. South



Map of Rajasthan

and east of the hills, in what was once Mewar, Kotah and Bundi, the countryside is fertile and green, with many hills, long stretches of woodland and lakes, fertile plateaus, wide vales and, by Indian standards, prosperous villages.

The Rajputs are descendants of Hunas, Gurjaras, Pariharas and other central Asian tribes who invaded India in the fifth and sixth centuries and broke up the Gupta empire. Thereafter they were gradually assimilated into Hinduism. Their aristocracy was ennobled as the Rajputs; the rank and file became the Jats, or cultivators. Numerous myths and legends were devised to improve on their origins. Thus the Sesodias of Mewar claimed descent from the sun. More modest houses claimed descent only from the moon. The Parihar, Parmar, Chalukya, Chauhan and other tribes claimed to be born of fire on Mount Abu. From the eighth century onward the Rajputs gained in power, and by the tenth and eleventh centuries the whole of northern, western and central India was under their rule. At this stage Islam began extending its power toward India. The Rajputs were defeated in a series of battles and ultimately northern India was occupied by the Muslims.

The word Rajput was synonymous with valor, chivalry and patriotism. "When the home and hearth is in danger, when religion is at stake, when women folk are in distress, then is the time to die fighting," says a Rajput poet. War was a form of recreation. When it was not readily available the princes turned to lovemaking, hunting and listening to martial ballads that told of the bravery of their ancestors on the field of battle. Even now the Rajputs regard the bearing of arms as their true profession. As often in history, this preference is accompanied by an aversion for manual labor. In addition to bravery the Rajputs were given to tribalism, blood feuds, vendettas and mutual jealousies that prevented them from putting up a united resistance to invaders.

Women had a distinctive place in Rajput society. They had a high sense of honor and deep loyalty to their husbands. When resistance in battle was hopeless or chances of victory remote, the men dressed themselves in saffron clothes with green grass sprinkled on their heads and recklessly attacked the enemy and died fighting. The women, to protect their honor, then immolated themselves in a ceremony known as *jauhar*. It has no parallel in any other country. A Rajput wife, on receiving news of the death of her husband, said: "What virtuous wife survives her lord? . . . The woman, who survives her husband who falls in the field of battle, will never obtain bliss, but wander a discontented ghost in the region of unhallowed spirits."<sup>1</sup> Instances have been recorded of chiefs who fled from the battle only to be called sternly to account when they reached home.

James Tod, the chronicler of the Rajputs, tells as follows of Sunjogta, wife of Prithviraj Chauhan, last Hindu king of Delhi and Ajmer: ". . . by her seductive charm, [she lulled] her lover into a neglect of every princely duty. Yet when the foes of his glory and power invade India, we see the enchantress at once start from her trance of pleasure, and exchanging the softer for the sterner passions, in accents not less strong because mingled with deep affection, she conjures him, while arming him for the battle, to die for his fame, declaring that she will join him in 'the mansions of the sun.' "<sup>2</sup> When Prithviraj was defeated by Muhammad Ghori, Sunjogta along with her maids committed suicide by jumping into fire.

Rajput society was thoroughly feudal. It centered first on the Raja, with whom were linked the Jagirdars, or fiefholders, who held the small districts (fiefs) into which the state was divided. The Jagirdars were required to attend the court of the Raja, ride with him while out hunting and not be absent without permission. In wartime they were required to render military service, and if the occasion arose to offer themselves as hostage for the Raja. They were subdivided into grades according to the number of mounted soldiers and infantrymen they were obliged to furnish after making allowance for the troops required for the protection of their fortresses.

Surrounding the fortresses in turn were the huts of the cultivators, the Jats and

<sup>1</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* (London, 1829–1832), Vol. I, p. 621.  
<sup>2</sup>*Annals*, Vol. I, p. 623.

the Meenas (a robber caste). In case of war or disorders everyone took shelter in the fortress. This social pattern can still be traced in the villages of Rajasthan. The ruined fortresses, usually perched on precipitous crags, have a great and desolate beauty.

In the rise of painting in Rajasthan, economics had a role. During the Mughal period Surat in Gujarat was the foremost port in India; Ahmedabad was a busy center for the manufacture of brocade, silk and cotton cloth that were exported from the country. Goods and bullion from the Middle East and Europe reached India through Surat, and Indian manufactures were exported from there to the West. These trade routes passed through Rajasthan. When Sawai Jai Singh, the Raja of Jaipur, was appointed Military Commandant of Surat and Raja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur had at the same time extended his dominions, Khafi Khan, the Muslim historian, noted that as a result the two Rajas held all the country from sixty miles south of Delhi to the shores of the sea at Surat.<sup>3</sup> They levied duty on the goods in transit and this and the trade in general were good sources of income. In consequence they were able to employ artists, including those who had left the court of Delhi. Quite a number were Muslims. But here again, economics was a liberalizing influence. For, given the promise of steady employment, these artists found no problem in tackling Hindu religious themes for their new masters.

In the eleventh century two major developments took place in Indian intellectual and spiritual life. In literature vernacular languages known as Prakrit and later on such regional languages as Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi and dialects of Hindi replaced Sanskrit. And in religious thought Vaishnavism, which popularized the worship of Vishnu as the Supreme Being, became the popular creed of the Hindus. The leader of this new religious movement was Ramanuja (*ca.* 1070–1137), a south Indian saint. The *Bhagavata Purana* was written at Conjeevaram in southern India in the tenth to eleventh centuries. Toward the end of the twelfth century, Jayadeva, the court poet of the last Hindu king of Bengal, Lakshmana Sen, wrote the *Gita Govinda*, a poem in Sanskrit on the love of Radha and Krishna. This, as noted earlier, is an allegory in which the human soul, represented by Radha, is striving to escape the allurement of the senses and finds peace in mystical union with Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu.

Krishna is a highly characteristic figure who is omnipresent in Rajput painting. His blue skin is symbolic of the sky. His yellow wrap is a symbol of light. He wears a crown of peacock feathers, a symbol of the rainbow. On his neck is a garland of wild flowers, a symbol of vegetation. He carries a flute, and when he plays on it the entire creation is enraptured. In 1916 the great student of Indian painting, A. K. Coomaraswamy, identified Rajput painting with a tradition separate from that of the Mughals. In a masterful definition of its themes he tells that "the sound of Krishna's flute is the voice of Eternity heard by the dwellers in Time." Radha is the human soul that

<sup>3</sup>William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, edited by Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta, n.d.), Vol. II, p. 4.

becomes instinct with new life from the moment she sees Krishna.

From the twelfth century onward, India was invaded by Muslim armies from the north. The sword of Islam seared through the vast confusion of gods and goddesses, myths and legends which had grown in India like a tropical jungle, and declared that One Great God was the supporter of the world and helper of the virtuous. But the Hindu masses found this a cold and intellectual if simplifying truth. They continued to feel the need of a loving and personal God; Islam thus stimulated the development of the Krishna cult. Krishna worship inspired the romantic and mystical literature of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. And this literature, in its turn, inspired the Rajput painting of Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills.

The country around Mathura, known as Braja, the legendary land of Krishna, became the home of a school of poets devoted to Krishna worship founded by Vallabhacharya (born 1478) and his son Vithalnatha. The poetry of Vallabhacharya in turn inspired Sur Das (1479–1584), the blind poet whose poems in praise of Krishna were compiled in the *Sur Sagar*. Mira Bai (1504–1550), the princess of Mewar, also wrote a number of devotional poems in honor of Krishna. Keshav Das (*fl.* 1580–1601) wrote his famous *Rasikapriya*, which deals with the theme of lovers and sweethearts. Krishna is the *nayak*, or the lover, and Radha, the *nayika*, or the sweetheart. Bihari Lal (1595–1663) wrote 700 verses on the love of Radha and Krishna, and the collection of these verses, named *Sat Sai*, became popular all over northern India. These poets fed the deeper levels of existence served by beauty and religion and in which the common link of all the great faiths is the celebration of love.

In Hindu religious thought no distinction is made between human and divine love, and, indeed, divine love is achieved through human love. The highest form of human love is that of man and woman, which is symbolized by the love of Radha and Krishna.

Paradoxically, the Hindu society in which the theme of romantic love of the Radha-Krishna legend developed was a puritanical society in which women were kept in rigid seclusion—"Where the rays of the sun may not touch and even the moon is not allowed to see the fair one." Brides met grooms only at their wedding. All association between men and women was governed by restrictive and formal rules. It seems probable that the romantic love of Radha and Krishna had a strong appeal in this austere setting as a surrogate for repressed emotion. Moreover, here was a god who was human and loving and close to the life of farmers, herdsmen and the *gopis*, or cowgirls. His democratic identification with the pastoral scenes and sports in the *Bhagavata Purana* earned him, and continues to win him, the affection of the peasants of India.

Krishna worship also had a humanizing effect on the martial Rajputs. In every Rajput palace from the sixteenth century onward Krishna was worshiped, and in the eighteenth century religious fervor reached a high pitch all over Rajasthan. Along with portraits, court and hunting scenes, the Krishna legend became a major theme

of Rajput painting. He was equally omnipresent in the bright colors of Mewar and Marwar, the passionate expression of Bundi and the tender paintings of Kishangarh and Jaipur.

In winter Rajasthan is full of color, but in summer before the rains it is drab. Little vegetation can be seen. In the bare fields the scattered *khejri* trees (*Prosopis spicigera*) lift their mutilated limbs toward a pitiless sun in an atmosphere often choked with stifling dust. Perhaps in compensation for these bleached surroundings, and as a reminder of the more colorful seasons, the people have an appetite for color not equaled in any other part of India. The cloth trappings of bullocks and camels combine strong reds, yellows, blues and blacks. Men wear red and orange turbans. The women, particularly in their *dupattas*, use all the colors of the rainbow. So it is with the painting. That of Mewar, Bundi and Marwar especially makes strong use of primary colors—reds, blues and yellows. We turn now to the painting of Mewar, the greatest and most independent of the Rajput states.



Palace on Pichola Lake, Udaipur

## CHAPTER VIII

### MEWAR

**M**EWAR, or Udaipur State, as it was subsequently called, is partly a plateau of fine open undulating country and is partly covered with hills, rocks and dense jungle that is the haunt of the spotted deer, antelope and wild boar. Scattered throughout the state are numerous lakes and tanks on whose banks still stand elegant palaces and pavilions.

Among the states of Rajasthan, Mewar had much the most eventful history. Its rulers, called Maharanas, enjoyed the highest rank among the Rajput chiefs of India. They were also the leaders of Hindu resistance to Muslim invaders. The other Rajput rulers vied with each other for the honor of providing brides to the Mughal emperors and fighting their wars. The Maharanas of Mewar insisted on their independence.

Their capital cities of Chitor and, later on, Udaipur were cultural centers of importance where literature, architecture and painting received great encouragement.

The rulers of Mewar belonged to the Sesodia clan of Rajputs and claimed descent from Kusha, the younger son of Rama. The sixth ruler, Bapa Rawal, occupied Chitor in 734. Chitor is built on an enormous rock three and a half miles long and 500 feet above the surrounding plain, which it commands as a monarch. The fort area is covered with temples, victory pillars and other ruins, all of which attest eloquently to Mewar's notable past. No defensive work in India rivals it in strength or grandeur.

Chitor was not, however, invulnerable. It was sacked three times, and scars of these catastrophes litter the plateau. Among these ruins is the palace of Rana Ratan Singh and his Rani, Padmini. It is a large edifice surrounded by high walls overlooking an artificial lake—in India a tank. And on a small island in the lake stands the palace of Padmini. Padmini was the Helen of India. Lured by her beauty, as well as the ambition of conquering Chitor, which was a symbol of the strength of the Rajputs, Alauddin Sultan of Delhi laid siege to the fort in 1303. He was unsuccessful and eventually promised to depart if he could first have a glimpse of Padmini. The siege had evidently become tedious, so his proposal was accepted, although with some technical precautions. Padmini was shown through mirrors. Thereafter the Rana courteously accompanied the Sultan to his camp, where, treacherously, he was detained. Meanwhile the sight of Padmini, even in reflection, had inflamed the passion of the susceptible Sultan to an unfortunate level. He sent her a message that her husband would be released only if she would choose to enter his harem. Padmini agreed, subject to the condition that she be allowed to come in a manner befitting her dignity and that she have a farewell interview with her husband for half an hour. The Sultan accepted. Seven hundred litters, all well covered, were sent out of the fort to the place where the Rana was confined. Instead of Padmini and her female servants, they contained Rajput warriors who rescued Rana Ratan Singh and took him back to the fort. Alauddin Sultan reacted to this Trojan tactic with a desperate assault on the fort. He was successful, and when resistance became hopeless a funeral pyre was lighted in a subterranean room open to the sky. Into this, in solemn procession, marched Padmini and her ladies, to be consumed by the flames. Their men, clad in saffron clothes, perished fighting. The city was sacked and its buildings destroyed by the invaders.

In 1540, the story of Padmini inspired the romance of *Padumavati* by Malik Muhammad Jaisi, a Muslim poet of Jais in the Rae Bareli district of Uttar Pradesh. This romance was illustrated in painting of the Mewar court. And it provided a common theme for Rajput painting. Where a lady holding a parrot is shown, it is Padmini with her favorite parrot, Hiraman.

Among the early rulers of Mewar, Rana Kumbha (1433–1468) was a distinguished scholar and musician. His palace, capped with elegant pavilions, was one of

the most striking buildings in Chitor. His tower of victory, which still dominates the plateau, proclaims his victory over Sultan Muhammad Khilji of Malwa and Kutub-uddin of Gujarat. It is nine stories in height, and adorned with Hindu gods and goddesses and sculptures of women in seductive poses.

The second siege of Chitor was by Bahadur Shah, Sultan of Gujarat, in 1535. The infant Rana, Udai Singh, was carried away to a place of safety. The Queen-Mother, Jwahar Bai, led a rally in which she was slain. According to a suspiciously precise statistical legend, thirteen thousand women performed *jauhar* by jumping into fire and more than thirty thousand Rajputs died fighting.

The third siege was by Akbar in the winter of 1567–1568. The Rajput chiefs, Jaimal and Fatta, put up a heroic resistance. Their bravery is commemorated in many ballads and their names are still household words in Rajasthan. Thereafter Chitor became a total ruin, a haunt of tigers and wild boars with bats flitting undisturbed through the palaces. The outer courts, where the chieftains and followers had once assembled, were overgrown with dank shrubs and grass. So, a ruin of great magnificence, it remains to this day.

Udai Singh (1537–1572) built a new capital on the Pichola Lake in 1559 and occupied it after the catastrophe in Chitor. He called it Udaipur after himself. Udai Singh was succeeded by his son, the famous Rana Pratap (1572–1597), who resumed the war against the Mughal empire. Harassed by the armies of Akbar, he chose the life of a homeless wanderer living in caves and jungles, sleeping on beds of straw. He also followed a scorched-earth policy, as a result of which cultivation was abandoned and Mewar reverted to jungle. “The silence of the desert prevailed in the plains; grass had usurped the place of the waving corn; the highways were choked with the thorny babul, and beasts of prey made their abode in the habitations of his subjects.”<sup>1</sup>

But Akbar continued his effort to subdue Pratap. And when the latter insulted Man Singh of Amber, a favorite of Akbar’s—Pratap had treated Man Singh as an apostate for having given his sister in marriage to Akbar—an army was dispatched under Salim to inflict final punishment.

On June 18, 1576, the climactic battle took place at Haldighat, which has been called the Thermopylae of Mewar. Pratap cut his way to Salim and his famous horse Chetak charged against the elephant ridden by Salim, placing his forelegs on its trunk. The driver of the elephant was slain and Salim was saved only by the steel plates of the howdah. The elephant ran away in panic. However, the artillery of the Mughals levied a heavy toll on the Rajputs, and Pratap himself, who had already received seven wounds, was forced to flee. The gallant Chetak saved him from his pursuers by leaping a mountain torrent. But then the loyal horse, which had been seriously wounded, fell. Sakta, a brother of Pratap and his deadly enemy who had joined the Mughals, now forgot his enmity and the brothers embraced in friendship. He gave his own horse to Pratap, who thus escaped the Mughals. At the spot where

<sup>1</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, edited by William Crooke (London, 1920), Vol. I, p. 388.



Plate 11. Cowgirls searching for Krishna. Mewar, about 1730. Victoria Hall Museum, Udaipur

the gallant Chetak died an altar was raised. These events are also frequently told in the paintings of Mewar. According to Tod, the scenes of the fall of Chetak and the meeting of the two brothers were once painted on the walls of half the houses of Udaipur.

After his defeat at Haldighat, Pratap turned to guerrilla warfare. It was a time of much hardship. As Tod relates, "The wife of his bosom was insecure, even in the rock or the cave; and his infants, heirs to every luxury, were weeping around him for food: for with such pertinacity did the Mughal myrmidons pursue them, that five meals have been prepared and abandoned for want of opportunity to eat them. On one occasion his queen and his son's wife were preparing a few cakes from the flour of the meadow grass, of which one was given to each; half for the present, the rest for a future meal. Pratap was stretched beside them pondering on his misfortunes, when a piercing cry from his daughter roused him from reflection: a wild cat had darted on the reserved portion of food, and the agony of hunger made her shrieks insupportable."<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, Akbar, moved by the bravery and suffering of his enemy, relaxed his pressure on Mewar.

Amar Singh I, after a prolonged warfare, submitted to the Mughal army of Jahangir commanded by Prince Khurram (later Shah Jahan) in 1614. There followed a peaceful period and Mewar recovered from the ravages of war. Amar Singh built the palaces at Udaipur called Amar Mahal and Badal Mahal, or Cloud Palace.

Painting at Udaipur also revived beginning with the reign of Karan Singh II (1620-1628). The latter was a friend of Prince Khurram, and thus familiar with Mughal painting; and there is a portrait of Karan Singh with Shah Jahan in the Mughal style. Karan Singh also enlarged the palace on the Pichola Lake and began the island palace of Jagmandir, where Khurram lived as a refugee when he revolted against his father.

Jagat Singh (1628-1652) completed the Jagmandir palace and the Jagdish temple. He also built the marble palace on Jagniwas Island. With its columns, paths, reservoirs and fountains, interspersed with orange and lemon groves and parterres of flowers, this palace remains one of the most interesting and beautiful buildings in India. It was a favorite resort of the Rana and his chiefs in the hot summer months, where "they listened to the tale of the bard, and slept off their noonday opiate amidst the cool breezes of the lake, wafting delicious odors from myriads of the lotus-flower which covered the surface of the waters."<sup>23</sup> In the middle of the palace, secluded from the common gaze, is a small tank or pool in the form of a maze with a marble chair in the center. Here the Ranas sat and watched their lovely concubines bathing and at play. This agreeable diversion was also a subject for the painters.

At this time (in 1648) a magnificent series of paintings of the *Bhagavata Purana*

<sup>22</sup>Annals (1920 ed.), Vol. I, p. 398.

<sup>23</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (London, 1829-1832), Vol. I, p. 373.

was painted by the Muslim artist Sahabdin. Sahabdin also illustrated the text of *Sukar Kshetra Mahatmya* in 1655. These paintings as well as a dated *Ramayana* of 1651–1652 are in the Saraswati Bhandar Library of Udaipur. The colophon says that the manuscript was made for Acharya Jaswant, was copied by Muni Hiranand and painted by Manohar at Udaipur.

The Mewar painting of this period is characterized by great and primitive vigor. Primary colors—reds, blues and yellows—are lavishly used. Archer describes it as “a style of virile intensity, characterized by glowing passionate color, deft rhythm and robust simplifications.”<sup>4</sup>

The next ruler, Raj Singh (1652–1681), was also a keen patron of art and literature, and the style of painting that had developed under Jagat Singh continued. Illustrations of the *Mahabharata*, the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the ballad on Prithvi Raj by the poet Chand Bardai which is known as *Prithvi Raj Raso*, the *Rasikapriya*, Bana Bhatta’s *Kadambari*, and the *Panchatantra* in the Saraswati Bhandar Library in Udaipur were all painted under the patronage of Raj Singh. Commenting on the paintings, Hermann Goetz observes, “The scenes are much simpler, but drawn with a sure hand, well composed and full of a joy of life and a fine sensitiveness of observation. They are far from any naturalism, and their individual components must still be accepted more as symbols than as exact descriptions of nature.”<sup>5</sup>

During the rule of Jai Singh and Amar Singh II, who followed, more palaces and temples were built. Among these was the exquisite marble Karan Mahal, which some have compared with Shah Jahan’s architecture at Agra.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the disarray at the Mughal court at Delhi was causing artists to seek employment in Udaipur. Mewar painting showed an increased Mughal influence.

Under Sangram Singh II (1710–1734), Krishna became the main inspiration of Mewar painting. Two series of paintings of the *Gita Govinda* were executed in 1723. A large series illustrating *Sundar Sringāra* by the poet Sundar Das was painted by the artist Jagannath in 1725. A series of 145 paintings illustrating the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavata Purana*, now in Victoria Hall Museum, Udaipur, also belongs to this period. From it we reproduce Plate 11, showing cowgirls searching for Krishna. It is a moonlit night and the composition is also in the form of a moon that endows the entire scene with its soft radiance. Trees are stylized and water is represented by a spiral convention. However, the beauty of Mewar painting lies not in its line but in its color. Here, as in others, yellows, reds, blues and blacks are boldly and effectively used.

In the story Krishna, taking his favorite *gopi* with him, roams the forest deserting the other cowgirls. The favorite is under the impression that Krishna is fully subject to her charms. So, in her pride, she asks him to carry her on his shoulders. But as she attempts to climb on his back he disappears, for God always humbles the proud. Describing the situation, *The Prema-Sāgara, or Ocean of Love* says, “As her hands were

<sup>4</sup>W. G. Archer, *Indian Paintings from Rajasthan* (London, 1957), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup>Hermann Goetz, “The First Golden Age of Udaipur,” *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. II (1957), p. 433.

“First Golden Age,” p. 435.



Plate 12. Rana Ari Singh with his favorite queen. Mewar, about 1762

G. K. Kanoria, Calcutta

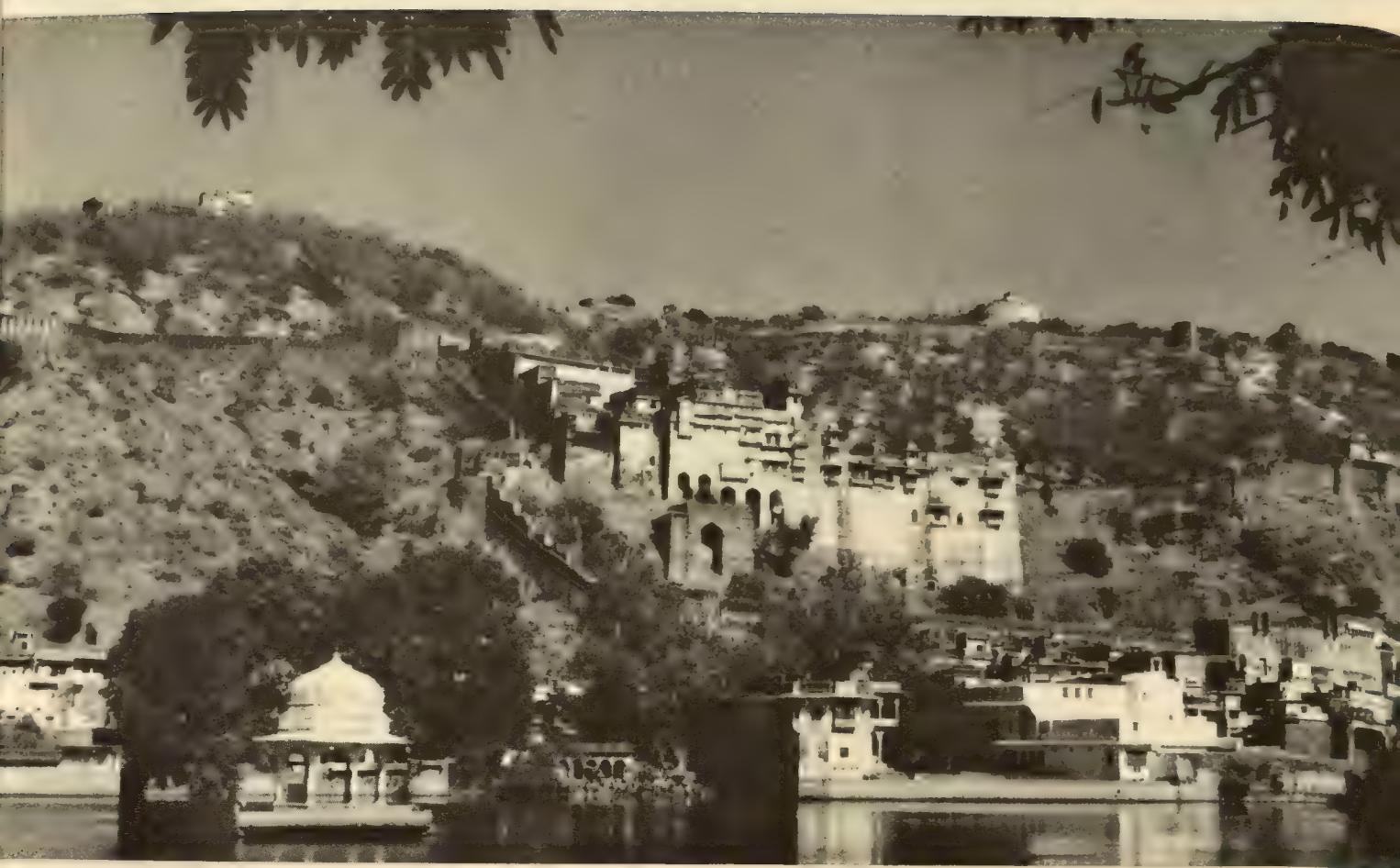
outstretched, so with extended hands she remained standing; just as, by pride, lightning may have been separated from the cloud, or the moonlight, angry with the moon, may have lingered behind; and the brilliance from her fair form, escaping [and] spreading on the earth, gave forth such beauty as though she were standing on a ground of beautiful gold . . . and heaving great sighs, through separation [from the loved one], was so standing alone in the forest that, hearing the sound of her crying all beasts, birds, trees, [and] climbing plants were crying [also]."<sup>77</sup> In this plight she was discovered by other girls and they set out together to search for Krishna. They asked the trees and birds of the forest whether they had seen him. The painting shows their bewildered quest.

Rana Ari Singh succeeded to the throne of Udaipur in 1762. He was exceedingly arrogant and rude, and his insolent behavior estranged his chieftains. He was slain by a prince of Bundi in the year 1773. They met on a hunt and were pursuing a boar when the Bundi prince drove his lance through the heart of the Rana. Possibly the murder was prompted by the Mewar nobles, who detested their own sovereign. Though an unfortunate ruler, Ari Singh was evidently an affectionate husband. In Plate 12 we see him with his favorite queen, seated in a golden pavilion and attended by female servants.

Painting in Udaipur continued under later rulers for another century. Equestrian portraits and shooting scenes were executed in particular profusion. The countryside of Mewar is still dotted with moldering shooting boxes of the Rajas and their fiefholders. In the great days there were many game preserves in which tiger, wild boar, deer, hare and hyena abounded. In the spring great hunts were organized. Beaters surrounded the recesses where the boars sheltered. Aided by yelping dogs they dislodged the boars and hares from their shelters. Then the Rajputs charged in, their horses galloping at full speed over ditches and bushes, their lances balanced in the air. Or they leaned from the saddle to slash the boars with their swords. It was a comprehensive slaughter—the ground was covered with carcasses of wild animals and also sometimes of horses and their riders. On such occasions the royal kitchen was moved out, and under a tree near a stream the flesh of hogs and hare was cooked and eaten. Artists immortalized these feats of valor and gastronomy.

Most painting and all originality came to an end at Udaipur about the middle of the last century, though artists working in the old style can still be seen. They produce only copies of old paintings but they are skilled and the tourists who patronize them are not necessarily cheated.

<sup>77</sup>Frederic Pincott, ed., *The Prema-Sâgara, or Ocean of Love* (London, 1897), pp. 82-83. A literal translation based on Enstrick's translation.



Bundi Palace

## CHAPTER IX

### BUNDI

THE COUNTRY of the Hara Rajputs, which lies to the west and slightly north of Udaipur, is called Haraoti. Its two states, Bundi and Kotah, are about equal in size and separated from each other by a range of hills. The northern state, Bundi, is hard and stony; Kotah is an alluvial plain made up of rich black cotton soil irrigated by wells. But in winter southern Bundi also blossoms—it is covered with green wheat, white and pink poppies, and blue linseed. The uncultivated countryside is green and dotted with trees. At the villages one sees margosa trees; around them are stone platforms on which peacocks and pigeons are fed by the villagers. Here and there the stately tree of heaven, *Ailanthus excelsa*, raises its head toward the sky.

As one approaches Bundi town he first sees the palace with its bay windows

and crown of pavilions perched on the hillside. It appears to grow out of the stony rocks. Higher up on the hill is the fort of Taragarh, its gray walls also merging with the landscape. Below the palace is the town. The white, cube-shaped houses are enclosed within walled fortifications pierced by four gates. To the south of the town is a lake with temples on the small islands, and to the east are more lakes with clumps of date palms on their banks. One passes the cenotaphs of the Rajas, some of which bear their images carved in relief. Carved also are images of their wives, who immolated themselves at the death of their husbands. Then comes a forest of *tendu*, leafless and gloomy, and then come suddenly into view an open glade and lake. This is Phul Sagar, the Flower Lake; by its side is a small summer palace of the Rajas surrounded by a garden of plantains. Water birds enjoy themselves on the surface.

The state that was governed from this lovely capital was founded by Rao Dewa in 1342.<sup>1</sup> It came in touch with the Mughal empire in 1554 and showed none of the obstinacy of Mewar. On the contrary, its ruler Rao Surjan ceded the fort of Ranthambhor to Akbar and accepted service under him. His successor, Rao Ratan served under Jahangir. On Rao Ratan's death the state was partitioned between his two sons, Gopinath and Madho Singh. Gopinath retained Bundi while Madho Singh was given Kotah to the south. Bundi was destined to be one of the great centers of Indian art.

Painting began under the powerful Rao Chattar Sal (1631–1659), who was made Governor of Delhi by Shah Jahan and later played a conspicuous part in the subjugation of the Deccan. “[He] had been personally engaged in fifty-two combats, and left a name renowned for courage and incorruptible fidelity.”<sup>2</sup> In his *Indian Painting in Bundi and Kotah* W. G. Archer has reproduced two paintings of Chattar Sal—in one he is paying homage to Shah Jahan, and in another he is riding an elephant. To the same period belong the *Bhagavata Purana* paintings in the collection of the Kotah Museum. The features which we now associate with Bundi painting are already evident. These owe something to the adjoining, more conservative state of Mewar. But the effects of the intimate association of Bundi rulers with the Mughal court are also clear.

Bundi artists had their own standards of feminine beauty—a receding forehead and chin, a strong nose and full cheeks and sharply penciled eyebrows. The landscape with its lakes, date palms and plantains is also faithful to that of Bundi. Colors—pure blues, reds, yellows and greens—are boldly used. Design and composition are sure and strong.

During the eighty years following the reign of Chattar Sal, under a succession of rulers—Bhao Singh, Aniruddha Singh and Budh Singh—there was a further development of painting; and then during the long reign of Ummed Singh (1749–1771) painting entered its most accomplished phase. Ummed Singh had first to recapture

<sup>1</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, edited by William Crooke (London, 1920), Vol. III, p. 1466. See also footnote, p. 1466.

<sup>2</sup>*Annals*, Vol. III, p. 1492.



Plate 13. Maidens surprised at their bath. Bundi about, 1770  
Kanwar Sangram Singh, Jaipur

his capital, which his predecessor, Budh Singh, had lost to Jaipur as a result of a feud. In the town square of Bundi a statue still stands to commemorate Ummed Singh's horse, Hanja, which, though struck by a cannonball, carried him to safety from the battlefield of Dablan. (Other Bundi rulers were not less attached to their horses. James Tod relates that Sikander Lodi, Emperor of Delhi, once asked Rao Dewa, the Bundi ruler, to give him his horse. Rao Dewa quietly packed off his family to Bundi, and when they were out of danger saddled his charger and, lance in hand, appeared under the balcony where the Emperor was seated. "Farewell, king," said the Rao; "there are three things your majesty must never ask of a Rajput; his horse, his mistress, and his sword.")<sup>3</sup>

According to Tod, Ummed Singh was one of the bravest, wisest and most faultless characters which Rajput history has recorded. "He was regarded as an oracle, while the treasures of knowledge which his observation had accumulated caused his conversation to be courted and every word to be recorded. The admiration paid to him while living cannot be better ascertained than by the reverence manifested by every Hara to his memory. To them his word was a law, and every relic of him continues to be held in veneration."<sup>4</sup> He gave up his throne in 1771 and lived in retirement in a secluded place in the valley until his death in 1804.

The painting reproduced in Plate 13 belongs to the period of Ummed Singh. The *gopis* are bathing as Krishna suddenly appears riding a horse-drawn chariot and holding a lotus. Much of the interest is in the reaction of the girls to this unexpected but cherished visitor. One is shown hastily slipping into her skirt; another is concealing herself behind her sari but with more than a suggestion of other preference; three are huddled intimately and screened by a fourth who has spread her sari like a curtain. The girls have small breasts and long sinuous bodies, and in this depart from the more ample Indian ideal of feminine beauty.

There is a class of Indian paintings known as Ragamala, or Necklace of Modes of Music. In these paintings the mood and sentiment behind the traditional forms of Indian music are visualized. Usually there are thirty-six *ragas* and *raginis*, consisting of six principal *ragas* and the five mistresses, or *raginis*, of each. In later Ragamalas more elaboration is introduced and each *raga* is further provided with eight sons, for a total of eighty-four *ragas*, *raginis*, and *sub-ragas*. Coomaraswamy describes the Ragamala as "profoundly imagined pictures of human passion."<sup>5</sup> Most show either joys of love in union or the pangs of love in separation. In *raginis* showing love in separation, lovesick heroines pine for their lovers. They watch peacocks, entrance black bucks with their music, or play with cobras, rams, and tigers. All of these are the symbols of the absent lover. Doubtless in Rajasthan this theme owes something to the fact that lovers were so often absent fighting each other.

<sup>3</sup>*Annals* (1920 ed.), Vol. III, p. 1465.

<sup>4</sup>*Annals* (1920 ed.), Vol. III, p. 1511.

<sup>5</sup>Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Hindi Ragmala Texts," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 43 (1923), p. 396.

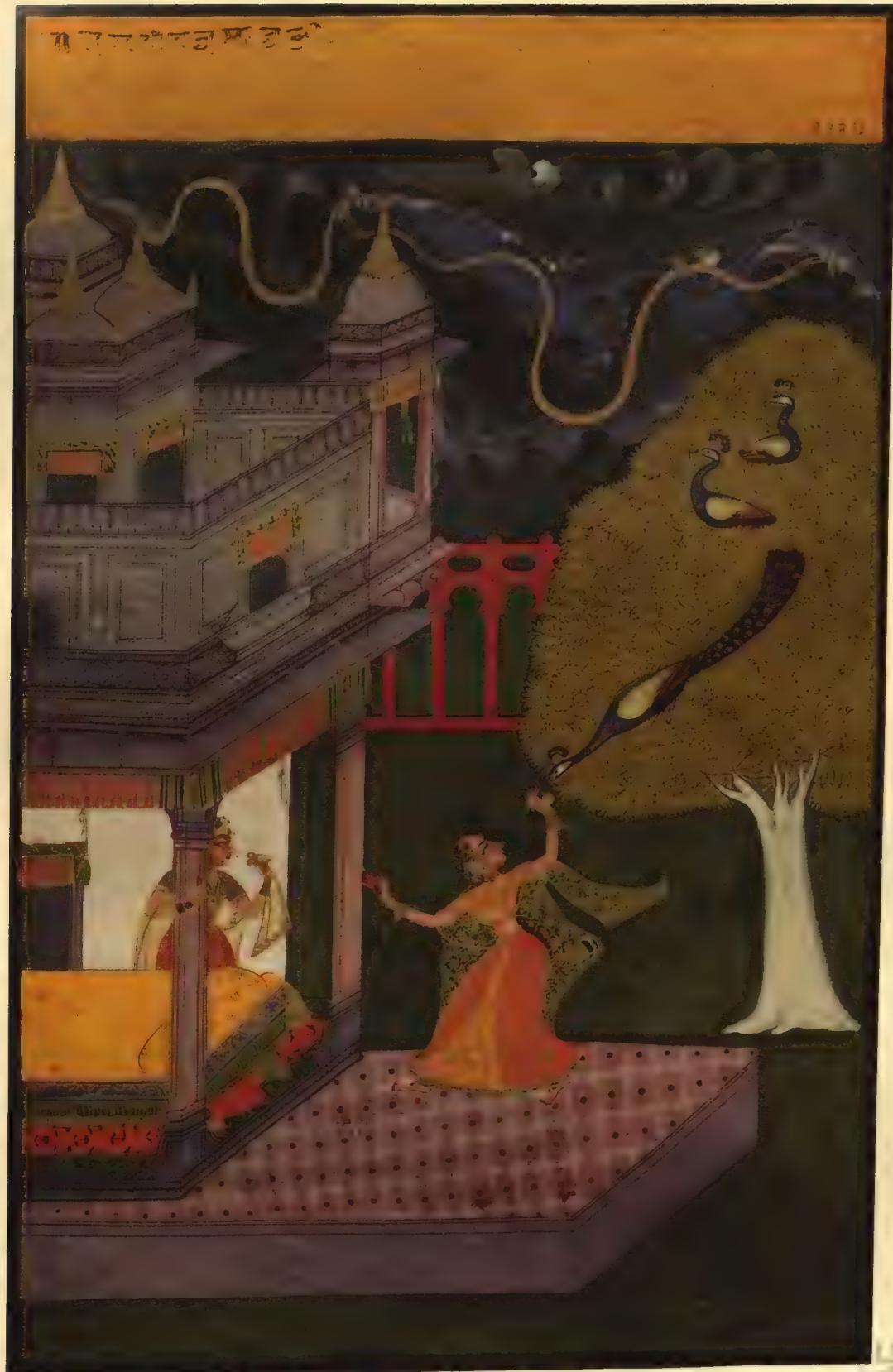


Plate 14. Lady Honeysweet. An illustration of the Ragini Madhu Madhavi. Bundi, about 1780  
*Alwar Museum, Alwar*

But many *ragas* and *raginis* depict love in union. *Ragini Lalita* is represented as a lady sound asleep, with the satisfied lover shown departing and carrying a garland. *Raga Malkaus* is represented by a prince and a princess seated on a throne making love. In *Ragini Vibhava* an angry lover is shooting a cock crowing on the cornice, while his mate is lying on the bed. The cock is a natural enemy of lovers because his early morning crowing disturbs their sleep. Red, the color representing passion, is used lavishly in these paintings. Thus do the *Ragamala* paintings depict the emotions that are inspired in men and women by poetry and music in different seasons and circumstances.

Plate 14, a representation of the *Ragini Madhu Madhavi*, is one of the finest examples of Bundi painting of the middle of the eighteenth century. The heat of summer has ended. In the delightful season of the rains amorous fancies stir among the young. There are dark clouds in the sky, which is lighted by flashes of lightning. As the lady rushes toward the pavilion, where a bed is ready, a peacock starts screaming. With a startled gesture she lifts her arm, for in Hindi poetry the peacock is a symbol of the lover. The following text, translated by Coomaraswamy, relates to this painting.

Madhu-madhavi is a treasury of beauty among women, she  
wears a green robe over all her body,  
Many kinds of jewels adorn her limbs, whom to behold,  
a myriad sages pale and faint.  
Coming from the palace, she stands in the garden; heavy  
black clouds are gathering joyfully,  
The sweet, sweet rumbling of thunder is heard, flashes of  
lightning light up the sky,  
Birds are disporting with many notes; the princess,  
beholding, stands there delighted.  
Her body blossoms like a flower for the meeting with her  
darling, she stands entranced,  
Dreaming of her lord's embrace, there is bliss in her  
heart.<sup>6</sup>

The love tale of *Madhavanala* and *Kamakandala* written in 1583 by Jodh, a court poet of Akbar, was a popular subject of Rajasthani painting. It proves that the erotic impact of music is not peculiar to the contemporary young. The story is as follows. Indignant husbands, fathers, brothers, all residents of the city of *Pushpavati*, complained to their ruler, Gobind Chand, about the irresistibly amorous effect on women of the vina played by the charming *Madhavanala*. The King put their complaint to test. He sent for sixteen girls from the dancing hall attached to the palace. They were shut up in a room and *Madhavanala* was ordered to play his tune. Under

<sup>6</sup>Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Part V, Rajput Painting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), pp. 91-92.



Plate 15. Lady yearning for her lover. Bundi, about 1780  
*John Kenneth Galbraith, Cambridge, Massachusetts*

its effect, the girls became wildly excited. Accordingly, the King exiled this dangerous offender from his kingdom.

Madhavanala arrived at Kamavati on a day when Kamakandala, a favorite dancer of the King, was performing a dance at the palace of Kamsen, the King. The gatekeeper did not allow him to enter. So he waited outside and detected a flaw in the time rhythm of the accompanying music. He told the gatekeeper to inform the King that a particular tambourine player had an artificial thumb. Kamsen, finding this to be correct, honored Madhavanala by inviting him inside. He offered him his own seat and gave him costly gifts. Kamakandala, the dancer, naturally desired to show her best to such a connoisseur of music. So instead of wearing a brassière she smeared sandal paste on her breasts. A bee attracted by the fragrance alighted thereon, and stung her on the nipple. Without disturbing her rhythmic dance, she drove away the bee by forcing her breath through her breasts. This extraordinary feat of yogic breath control proficiency was discerned only by Madhavanala. In admiration he gave her all the presents that the King had given him. This munificence annoyed Kamsen, who there and then banished Madhavanala. Forlorn and sad, he decided to seek the favor of King Vikramaditya of Ujjain, who was known for his patronage of the afflicted.

Arriving at Ujjain, Madhavanala could not get an audience with King Vikramaditya. He expressed his grief in a Sanskrit couplet, which he wrote on the walls of a Shiva temple, hoping that it might be read by the King. In Ujjain no one was unhappy; accordingly, Vikramaditya was surprised to read the sad verse. He sent out messengers to find the unhappy person. Ultimately a woman discovered Madhavanala and brought him before the King. Vikramaditya sent an ultimatum to Kamsen demanding Kamakandala and offering a threat of battle as the alternative. Kamsen chose the latter. Bloody action ensued, in which Vikramaditya was victorious. Madhavanala was thereupon united to Kamakandala and they lived happily ever afterward.<sup>7</sup>

Plate 15 is in the mood of this tale, although it does not follow the theme. It shows a lady with bare breasts lolling over a bed on a terrace. Her head rests on a bolster; her body is caught in an agony of desire. A companion, more serene, sympathizes with her torment. The halo on the moon is a special characteristic of Bundi painting of mid-eighteenth century.

Many Ragamala paintings show love in union. Plate 16, illustrating the Raga Malkaus, is an example. On a carpet on a terrace in a moonlit night the lovers embrace. Their eyes are deeply tintured with love and the woman is in a mood of joyous abandon. In the sky a male duck is in warm pursuit of its mate. Such symbols were much used in Rajput painting to convey the mood and intention of lovers.

A more complicated story lies behind Plate 17. The women of the Punjab in

<sup>7</sup>The story of Madhavanala and Kamakandala is given in Dr. Balbir Singh's *Madhavanala Kamakandala Charita Lahore*, n.d).



Plate 16. Dalliance. Bundi, about 1790  
Kanwar Sangram Singh, Jaipur

northern India are known for their beauty. Bernier thought the women of Lahore the finest brunettes in all the Indies and admired especially their fine and slender shape. To his regret, they were kept in strict seclusion and seldom appeared in the streets without veils. To obtain a sight of them he adopted the stratagem of following a richly harnessed elephant that had silver bells suspended from both sides. As soon as the ladies heard the tinkling of the bells they appeared in the windows. He felt himself well rewarded.

Mahinwal, or Herder of Buffaloes, was the name given to Izzat Beg, a merchant of Bukhara who came to Gujarat, a city on the Chenab River now in West Pakistan. The citizens of Gujarat gave him a warm welcome and entertained him with a royal feast. He admired the quality of food and was also impressed with the terra-cotta pottery in which it was served. On inquiry from his hosts, he learned that the pottery was manufactured by a potter by the name of Tulha. Next morning he visited the potter's shop. There the merchant saw the potter's daughter Sohni, meaning the "Beautiful," and fell in love with her at once. All metaphors and similes are exhausted in description of this beautiful Punjabi girl. Her face was like the moon, her eyes dark and innocent like those of a deer, her eyebrows like a bow, and her eyelashes like a hundred arrows and these pierced the heart of the merchant. A soft smile was hovering over her lips, and when she spoke it seemed as if she were scattering flowers. The stricken Izzat Beg purchased all the pottery that was lying in the shop, and thereafter became a frequent visitor. Suspecting something between his daughter and the merchant, the potter promptly married her off to another man of his own caste.

Izzat Beg then became the servant of a farmer on the other side of the river, and thus acquired the name of Mahinwal. Sohni used to swim on an inverted pitcher every night to meet him. Her husband's sister became aware of her nocturnal adventures and suspected their purpose. One evening she replaced the pitcher which Sohni used to hide in a bush near the river with an unbaked one. It was a dark and stormy night with lashing rain. When Sohni got into the water and started swimming, the unbaked pitcher dissolved. She was swept into a whirlpool and drowned.

Her love and the ensuing tragedy touched the hearts of the people of India. Fazl Shah, the Punjabi poet of Lahore, wrote the love tale of Sohni and Mahinwal in verse during the reign of Ranjit Singh in 1824. But there must have been earlier versions because it had already become a favorite theme in Mughal, Rajasthani and Kangra painting. The present version, Plate 17, was painted at Bundi in the late eighteenth century. On a bank of the river, a hermit is dozing over a hookah in a hut. A dog is lying curled up near the fire, and on a tree peacocks are sleeping with their heads concealed in their tail feathers. One can all but feel the silence of the night. Sohni is supported by a pitcher, presumably a sound one; Mahinwal, seated under a tree, is playing a flute. The water birds, a Bundi feature, are witnesses to the tryst.



Plate 17. Sohni swimming to meet Mahinwal. Bundi, about 1790  
Kanwar Sangram Singh, Jaipur.

After Ummed Singh, Bishen Singh (1771-1821) continued the patronage of painting. His main interest was hunting, and his triumphs over wild animals figure much in the paintings of this period. Painting continued under his successor, Ram Singh (1821-1889), and the *chitrashala*, or painted hall, in the Bundi Palace was decorated with murals. Palace processions, hunting scenes and anecdotes from the Krishna legend figure prominently in the murals. Some were copied from paintings and show ladies hunting, watching the flights of pigeons or riding. In the night scenes the moon always wears a halo. But, as elsewhere, the day of the painting was nearly over. Work became garish, decorative and vulgar. The painters, it has been said, began to be concerned with the popular taste.



Jodhpur Fort

## CHAPTER X

### THE DESERT KINGDOMS

JODHPUR, also called Marwar, with an area of 34,963 square miles, somewhat greater than Maine, was the largest state of Rajasthan. It is a sterile, sandy, and inhospitable country—the name Marwar means the “Region of Death.” Stunted acacias, thorny jujube, wild caper, *phog* (*Calligonum polygonoides*), woolly *buin* (*Aerua tomentosa*) and poisonous *ak* (*Calotropis procera*) comprise the scanty vegetation. Near the Aravalli hills there is some fertile land, but the west is all desert, a sea of sand in which “there are more spears than spear grass-heads, and blades of steel grow better than blades of corn.”<sup>1</sup>

The few villages are large and remote from each other. In the center of the

<sup>1</sup>*The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, new ed. (Oxford, 1908), Vol. XIV, pp. 179–180.

typical village is the fortlike mansion of the Thikanedar, the erstwhile fiefholder. Nearby are stables where in the feudal days a couple of hundred horses, bullocks and cows were sheltered. Now they house only a few saddened horses and half-starved cows. The mansions are decorated with moth-eaten and faded tiger skins and have a penetrating atmosphere of decay. Democracy has ravaged these feudal monuments.

Surrounding the fortress-residence are the large mansions of the merchants, whitewashed and glistening in the sun. These merchants are the Marwaris, men of traditional aptitude for commercial and industrial organization. From their desert villages, they have gone forth to dominate the industry of the principal cities of India, especially of Calcutta and Bombay. Surrounding the mansions, in turn, are the adobe houses of the farmers, some of them roofed with reedlike stalks of *ak*. On the outskirts, generally, is a whitewashed temple built by some prosperous merchant. Every village is surrounded by a barrier of thorns of *Zizyphus nummularis*, the leaves of which are staple food for the goat and the camel. In the month of March this versatile plant also bears delicious berries, which are eagerly plucked and eaten by the urchins of the town. The water in the wells is far down. In the morning a procession of women wearing yellow and red wraps go to the well with brass vessels resting gracefully on their heads. Though life in the desert is hard, the women, and indeed all the villagers, lighten their toil by song and laughter.

The Rajas of Jodhpur belong to the Rathore clan of Rajputs and modestly claim descent from Rama, the hero of the epic *Ramayana*. In the twelfth century they ruled central and eastern India, with Kanauj as their capital. Jai Chand, the last of these rulers, was defeated by Muhammad Ghori in 1194. His nephew Siahji, with about two hundred followers, migrated to the desert of Rajasthan and in 1212 founded the state of Marwar. Jodhpur was founded in 1459 by Rao Jodha (1444-1488). One of his sons, Bika by name, founded Bikaner, the second of the great desert principalities of Rajasthan, to which we come later in this chapter.

Jodha built his fort on a scarped rock four hundred feet above the desert plain and commanding a sweeping view of the surrounding country. It stands intact and in perfect condition to this day, still the property of his descendants. The massive walls and towers are four miles in circuit. Seven gates cover the zigzag ascent. Two lakes under the walls and a reservoir ninety feet deep supplied water to the garrison. In the center are the palaces with immense courtyards and lattice windows of delicate designs. The corridors were once filled with rows of gloriously turbaned mace-bearers carrying gold- and silver-plated staffs. On the appearance of their master they shouted the title "Raj Rajeshwar," meaning the "King, the Lord of Kings." They have now been replaced by tourists who come to admire the gilded roofs and the mirror-studded walls of the Durbar Hall, where the Rajas held court and amused themselves with their dancing girls.

Below the fort lies the city of Jodhpur, a disorderly pile of brick and stone. The streets are crowded with camels, bullock carts, horse-drawn carriages and motor

trucks. The peasants from the desert wear red turbans, white tunics and dhotis. Rajputs still parade the streets twirling their jet-black mustaches. Their heads are covered with orange turbans that bulge rakishly on the left side. They wear the khaki breeches that have made Jodhpur a household name in all countries where polo and horse racing are known. A thriving industry of Jodhpur is the dyeing of turbans and *dupattas*. These flutter like enormous banners in all the colors of the spectrum in front of the dyers' shops.

As in other states of Rajasthan, a Jain style of painting flourished in Jodhpur in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A Ragamala series of 1623 was painted at Pali in a style of folk art. Painting in Mughal style developed under the patronage of Jaswant Singh (1638–1681), who served as Viceroy of the Mughals for Malwa, Gujarat and the Deccan. Many portraits of this ruler exist in the palace collection of Jodhpur, which indicates the presence of a considerable group of artists. Ajit Singh (1707–1724) continued the patronage of painting in the Mughal style. His successor Abhai Singh (1724–1750) was fond of dance and music and was also a keen patron of painting and literature. There is a lovely picture in the Jodhpur palace in which he is shown listening to music. The elongated female figures and oval faces reflect the Mughal style of the Muhammad Shah period.

Between 1760 and 1780, in the reign of Bijai Singh (1753–1793), the Mughal style faded and Rajput elements—linear rhythm coupled with glowing colors—became dominant in Jodhpur painting. Marwar enjoyed several years of peace under Bijai Singh; a large number of paintings from this period are in the Jodhpur palace collection. His successor, Bhim Singh (1793–1803), continued the patronage. Tod describes him as “a man of great personal and mental qualifications; a gallant soldier and no mean poet.”<sup>2</sup> Turbans of the period were of enormous height and the skirts of women were spread below like bells. Goetz describes the portraits of the women of the period as follows: their “eyes were elongated over the temples to the hair, their breasts and buttocks protruded like cups, whereas the waist was drawn in like that of a bee, the movements swung in a wild dance, the colours glowed like jewellery. The whole spirit was one of rakish extravagance and reckless lust for life. . . ”<sup>3</sup>

The late Jodhpur style, which can be regarded as the genuine product of the state, reached its climax in the reign of Man Singh (1803–1843). The early period of Man Singh's reign was stormy; he was much harassed by his chiefs and ministers. He was also under the influence of a religious mendicant, Deb Nath, who in the days of Man Singh's adversity had prophesied his accession to the throne. The followers of this Wolsey, who were called Naths, preyed rather skillfully on the respectable people of Jodhpur. They enticed boys from rich families and made them disciples of Deb

<sup>2</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, edited by William Crooke (London, 1920), Vol. II, p. 1077.

<sup>3</sup>Hermann Goetz, “Marwar,” *Marg*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (March 1958), p. 46.

Nath. They also developed liaisons with the women of well-to-do families. Because of their influence with the ruler, their victims suffered in silence.

In 1818 Jodhpur came under British protection. Tod, who met Man Singh in 1816, tells that he was a remarkably well read man with a good knowledge of history, a considerable dignity of manner and a commanding demeanor. Rid now of his worries, he patronized literature as well as painting. He wrote *Krishnavilas*, a poem in praise of Krishna. Two of his queens wrote poetry. Jodhpur became a seat of art and literature. Extensive series of paintings illustrating the *Shiva Purana*, *Nathacharitra*, the *Durgacharitra*, the *Panchatantra*, the *Ragamalas*, and the *Kama Sutra* were produced. Man Singh's principal artists were Amar Das, Shiv Das Bhatti, Moti Ram, Udai Ram, Bulaki, Dhirey, Mahesh, Dana and Jala. Exceptional among Indian painters, they have left signed and dated paintings. Apart from illustration of the classics, there are numerous paintings of Man Singh surrounded by the women of his harem—swinging with them, listening to music, or bathing with them in a pool.

These paintings are characterized by garish colors with lavish use of yellow, blue and green. Spiral clouds lie on the horizon. Women wear bell-like skirts and a bodice covering only their breasts. Men wear side-whiskers, accordion-pleated coats, and flat twisted turbans. Man Singh evidently set this fashion.

The women of the desert, who also appear in the painting, have tall and graceful figures and fair complexions. It is said in Rajasthan that "The horse of Sind, the camel of Bikaner, the man of Marwar and the woman of Jaisalmer [an adjacent desert state] are the best of their kind."<sup>4</sup> To this day, brides from Jaisalmer remain in demand.

A representative specimen of the early nineteenth-century style of Jodhpur painting is to be seen in the Dhola-Marvani series painted during the reign of Man Singh. These paintings, numbering 121, are 16 × 11 inches in size and are preserved in the Palace Museum at Jodhpur. The Dhola-Marvani ballad was composed by the poet Kallol in 1620 during the reign of Raval Hariraj of Jaisalmer.<sup>5</sup> According to this legend, there ruled in Pugal, a place in the Great Indian Desert on the border of Jaisalmer, a king named Pingal Rao, who had a beautiful daughter, named Marvani. A ruler of Narwar, named Nala, had a handsome son called Dhola. Nala came on a pilgrimage to Pushkar, a holy place on a lake near Ajmer, with his family. Because of a severe drought in Pugal, Raja Pingal Rao also came to Pushkar with his family. Nala and Pingal Rao became friends.

One day Nala, while in pursuit of a boar, came to the camp of Pingal Rao and was impressed by the beauty of the child Marvani. He thought of his son Dhola, who was then three years of age and still unmarried. He invited Pingal Rao to a feast in his camp; there he proposed marriage between Dhola and Marvani. This was accepted by Pingal Rao and his queen, and the marriage was performed. For some time the

<sup>4</sup>K. R. Qanungo, *Studies in Rajput History* (Delhi, 1960), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>The story of Dhola and Marvani is given in a pamphlet by Bisheshwar Nath Reu published by the Palace Library in Jodhpur (1924), describing the paintings of the series in the Maharaja's collection, and also by Qanungo in his *Studies in Rajput History*.

two families lived at Pushkar. Then Marvani left for Pugal with her parents and Dhola went with his father to Narwar.

The years passed and Dhola and Marvani grew up in their respective realms. Nala considered the prince's marriage in infancy a comparatively inconsequential episode and remarried him to Malvani, a daughter of the King of Malwa. Raja Pingal Rao, ignorant of Dhola's second marriage, sent messengers to Narwar to bring him to Pugal. Malvani saw that no messenger reached Dhola.

More years passed and Marvani was now a young lady in full bloom of early womanhood. Rainy season is a delightful time in the desert; the brown earth suddenly becomes green and amorous fancies as suddenly arise in the minds of the young. Marvani saw Dhola in a dream and was filled with intense longing for him. Then one day a horse merchant, who was passing through Pugal, told Nala of Dhola's second marriage. Marvani came to know and was overwhelmed with grief. In her helplessness, she even asked the birds to carry her message of love to Dhola.

Her mother, realizing the intensity of her suffering, spoke to the King. A bard was commissioned to go to Narwar, with letters from the Raja and Marvani to Dhola. On reaching Narwar, he was taken prisoner by Malvani's retainers. But he won permission to sing of the beauty of Marvani and of her distress at her separation from Dhola. Thus Dhola was reminded of his forgotten bride from the desert. He rewarded the bard richly and, under the pretext of going hunting, personally saw him off.

When he returned to the palace, Dhola asked permission of his queen, Malvani, to travel abroad. Malvani, who had been secretly making inquiries and knew the cause of her husband's restlessness, had other thoughts. "How does a man think of going abroad when he has the music of *Veena* to hear, a mare to ride and a fair wife in his home?" Dhola, more discreet than courageous where Malvani was concerned, then resorted to subterfuge. He proposed going to Idar to buy ornaments for her. She replied that she would prefer local ornaments even if they were more costly. Then he asked her permission to go to Multan to buy horses and to Kutch to buy fast camels. Malvani continued to object. Dark-eyed enchantresses abounded in those places; she could not risk his going.

Ignoring further protests, Dhola ordered a fast camel for his journey. Malvani detained him again by having the camel lamed. However, one night Dhola, leaving Malvani asleep, escaped. She was awakened by the grunts of the camel and tried vainly to stop the escape. "The mountain torrent and the affection of a faithless lover are impetuous to start with but they ebb away soon," she observed in her grief. She dispatched her parrot after the fleeing Dhola; it overtook him and told him that Malvani had died of sorrow. Dhola told the bird to have the funeral rites performed with sandalwood and proceeded on. When Malvani heard this unkind remark, she lost all hope.

Eventually Dhola reached Pushkar Lake. Beyond lay the desert, vast and frightening, where the camel alone was to be his companion. On the desert there is a

close understanding between man and beast. In a dialogue between Dhola and his camel, Dhola asks him to drink his fill from the lake since for many days he would have to go without. The camel's reply shows that even he does not like, but only tolerates, the desert. "This is a cursed land where camels get only thorny brambles to eat but no grass, where there are swarms of locusts, and people are uncouth nomads who drink the milk of sheep."

On reaching Pugal, Dhola stops near a well, where he is recognized by one of the women drawing water. The news of his arrival is taken to the Queen. He is given a rousing welcome. After the dinner he goes into the harem and meets Marvani. The ballad now gives a frank account of the revels of the couple; the paintings show scenes of strenuous lovemaking.

After a few days' stay at Pugal, Dhola expressed a desire to return to his kingdom with Marvani. So they went, after a traditional ceremony, loaded with presents. Plate 18 shows them on their journey. Dhola sits in front, Marvani behind. The painting is a fine and vigorous example of how they were depicted by the artists of Rajasthan. A great welcome was accorded to them at Narwar. Malvani was unhappy at first but Marvani saw that she was treated with consideration. They became friends and as co-wives lived happily ever after, sharing equally the affection of Dhola.

Takhat Singh (1843–1873), who succeeded Man Singh, was debauched and licentious. Since he resembled him in appearance, it is not easy to distinguish his portraits from those of his predecessor. He can presumably be distinguished, however, by his entourage. It was massively feminine. When he rode, a number of women on horseback followed him. On occasion he was accompanied by an orchestra of women seated on an elephant. As a precaution, men were not permitted to come out of their houses when the royal procession passed. His mobile harem was thus secluded and protected. In his reign painting in Jodhpur came to an end.

To the north of Jodhpur, closely related to it in history, lies Bikaner. It too is a vast waste of desert and sand dunes, though with some richly irrigated valleys. It gets its name, as we have noted, from Prince Bika Rathore, a son of Rao Jodha. Accompanied by a band of his kinsmen, Bika left Marwar on September 30, 1465. He slowly penetrated the desert, defeating the tribes of Bhatis and Jats that inhabited the area, and in 1488 he laid the foundation of the city of Bikaner. It was also to become a famous center of painting.

This probably began when Kalyanmal (1542–1571) established a cordial relationship with Akbar, to whom he gave his daughter in marriage. Kalyanmal's son, Rai Singh (1571–1612), was Akbar's distinguished general and played a prominent role in the expansion and consolidation of the Mughal empire. He was appointed Governor of the Punjab, the Deccan and Gujarat in succession. The present fort of Bikaner, a vast and imposing structure, was built by him in 1594.

Bikaner was on the trade route to Sind and Muslim pilgrims going for *hajj*



Plate 18. Dhola and Marvani riding their favorite camel. Marwar, about 1820  
*The Maharaja of Jodhpur, Palace Library, Jodhpur*

to Mecca passed through it. Trade and commerce flourished in the security of Rai Singh's rule. Rich Jain merchants built magnificent houses in which they buried their hoards. They also employed artists to prepare illustrated versions of their religious books. Poets came to Bikaner to enjoy the patronage of Rai Singh, who was himself a scholar of Sanskrit. He encouraged scholars to write commentaries on Sanskrit classics. Contact with the highly cultured court of Akbar seems also to have given him a taste for art, and he became an enthusiastic collector of paintings.

The next ruler of importance was Karan Singh (1631–1669), whose reign coincided with those of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. His name derives from Karni Ji, the patron goddess of Bikaner. About 1650, a Mughal artist, Ali Raza, was working at Bikaner for Karan Singh. Two portraits in late Shah Jahan style show him, as Goetz suggests, "a rather slow-witted, but honest and energetic, almost obstinate character." A number of Ragamala and genre paintings by Mughal artists, Ustad Isa, Mahmad and others, relate to this period. Harem scenes with the royal ladies dressed in the Mughal costumes fashionable even among the Rajputs were a popular subject. We reproduce such a painting by the artist Ustad Hamid Ruknuddin in Plate 19. It was painted in 1666 and is now in the Lallgarh Palace at Bikaner. It shows a lady entertaining a friend, attended by a group of female servants. The "elegant, nervous draughtsmanship, the delicate harmony of colours, the perfection of technical execution, and the air of restrained and yet easy social distinction"<sup>6</sup> reach the level of the best art of the Jahangir period.

During the rule of Anup Singh (1669–1698), more artists came to Bikaner from Aurangzeb's court. Anup Singh participated in the siege of Golconda, and was appointed administrator of Aurangabad and later Adoni in the Deccan, where he died in 1698. His court also was a center of learning, music and painting. He inherited Karan Singh's artists, including the talented Hamid Ruknuddin. Anup Singh added painting from the Deccan, including his share of the loot of the royal collections of Bijapur, Golconda and Adoni.

Sujan Singh (1700–1736) continued the patronage of artists. The *Rasikapriya*, which was partly illustrated during the rule of his predecessor, was completed. Nuri was his principal artist, and another master was Ustad Isa Muhammad. Goetz observes of the painting of this period that it "produced innumerable miniatures, well executed and decorative, but not of any exceptional quality—pictures of girls in all moods, in pretty costumes or undressed, at all stages of their toilet, at games, singing, playing musical instruments, setting off fire works, looking at the moon, in love, drinking, tipsy. These pictures are small, nervous, almost neurasthenic."<sup>7</sup>

Mughal style continued to influence Bikaner painting until the middle of the eighteenth century. During the latter half of the rule of Gaj Singh (1745–1787) there was a distinct change in style. The mannerism and conventions of Jodhpur style were

<sup>6</sup>Hermann Goetz, *The Art and Architecture of Bikaner State* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 105, 106.  
<sup>7</sup>*Art of . . . Bikaner*, p. 112.



Plate 19. A ladies' party. By Ustad Hamid Ruknuddin. Bikaner, 1666  
*Maharaja Dr. Karni Singh, Lallgarh Palace, Bikaner*

adapted, and a painting of Surat Singh (1787-1828) in 1809 by Ustad Kasim is hardly distinguishable from Jodhpur paintings. Turbans became enormous piles. Side-whiskers, and accordion-pleated coats were favored, as were strong colors. Eventually Bikaner painting became a lifeless craft. But today the visitor who travels to this still splendid city sees, along with the vast fort and fine palaces, some of the best pictures in India.



Fort and Palace, Kishangarh

## CHAPTER XI

### KISHANGARH

**I**N THE CENTER of Rajasthan, between Jaipur and Ajmer, lies the small state of Kishangarh. It was one of the least of the Rajput states—in area less than six hundred square miles. The summer visitor finds it drab, dry and colorless, but when the rains come it is transformed into a green and smiling land with many lakes on which there are pink lotuses and ducks, herons and other waterfowl by the thousands. However, not even the beauty of its countryside would have saved Kishangarh for history had it not been for its painting. This, for romantic loveliness, is unrivaled in Rajasthani history.

It is of very recent discovery. In 1943, Eric Dickinson, Professor of English Literature at Government College in Lahore, poet and lover of Indian painting,





Plate 20. Radha and Krishna. By Nihal Chand. Kishangarh, about 1750  
*Maharaja Sardar Singh, Kishangarh*

happened to pay a visit to Kishangarh. After inspecting a large number of paintings in provincial Mughal style in the Maharaja's collection, he was somewhat reluctantly shown a portfolio of paintings of unusual size. "Now before our astonished gaze," he wrote,

was revealed a decor and a milieu that to match so rare a content might have taxed the Abyssinian maid singing on Mt. Abora. In the few paintings passing in review before us was revealed an amazingly tender, sensuous, yet over-refined Krishnaite world where pastoral bower was exchanged for palace garden replete with every accessory to beguile the devoted colloquies of lovers . . . Who could imagine so sensuous yet refined a treatment of the loves of Radha and Krishna as here was now revealed? For here the fountains splash in the enchanted clearings consecrated to the footsteps of the Divine Lovers; here, amidst a decor of marble pavilions and playing fountains, attendant with attendant vie ministering the tender ritual of love. Again in the center of a composition under a canopy graced with slender marble pillars the Divine Lovers exchange dalliance as they proffer delicious betels to each other under the dazzling radiance of the moon. Again in yet another, they are wafted in a scarlet boat across the pellucid waters of a lake to some mysterious bower by their *sakhis*. At any moment now, surely, these figures must rise up one and all and resolve their steps in the maze of an enchanted ballet excelling the art of Diaghilev or Baskt or the allure of Swan Lake.<sup>1</sup>

Dickinson did not exaggerate, even though he may have tried; his was one of the most notable discoveries in the history of art.

Kishangarh State was founded by Kishan Singh, a younger brother of Raja Sur Singh of Jodhpur. Because of a disagreement with his elder brother, he had left Jodhpur and settled at Ajmer; there he came in touch with Akbar. He won the favor of the Emperor, who gave him the territory included in the state. In 1611 he founded a town on the bank of Gundalao Lake which, after the Rajput custom, he named Kishangarh for himself. As a further reward for military services, Jahangir gave him the title of Maharaja. Kishan Singh died in 1615; sixteen rajas followed him in turn. Rup Singh (1644–1658) was a favorite of Shah Jahan and in the latter's service fought three wars in Afghanistan. He founded Rupnagar and made this his capital.

In the reign of Man Singh (1658–1706), artists were already working at Kishangarh and by the time of Raj Singh (1706–1748), the distinctive style of the state had evolved. There was a tendency to elongate the human figure, to make lavish use of green and to show panoramic landscapes. The setting had been provided for the great period of Kishangarh painting.

<sup>1</sup>Eric Dickinson, "The Way of Pleasure: The Kishangarh Paintings," *Marg*, Vol. III (1949), No. 4, p. 30.



Plate 21. Krishna holding Mount Govardhana. By Nihal Chand. Kishangarh, about 1755  
*Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares*

This began in 1748 when a remarkable ruler, Sawant Singh, ascended the throne of Kishangarh. He was a poet and wrote verse on Krishnaite themes under the pseudonym of Nagaridas. He was also an ardent patron of artists and scholars. In time he fell in love with a girl of humble origin who was a maid-servant to his step-mother. This girl, whose real name is not known, was called Bani Thani, which means only "smart and well dressed." She was also beautiful and an accomplished singer, and she acquired a smattering of Hindi literature, including poetry. She became Sawant Singh's mistress and, it is supposed, was the model for the feminine type portrayed by Nihal Chand, who in this period became the master artist of the court of Sawant Singh.

Poetry, painting, lovemaking, and the worship of Krishna were the main preoccupations of Sawant Singh. He thought less well of the dull routine of public administration. He was also much harassed by his ambitious younger brother, Bahadur Singh. Ultimately, he obtained peace by the sensible but somewhat unusual device of giving Bahadur Singh the city of Kishangarh along with half of the state. Sawant Singh ruled the remaining half from Rupnagar, which one sees portrayed in the works of Nihal Chand.

In 1757 Sawant Singh went a step further and abdicated his throne. Accompanied by Bani Thani he proceeded to Brindaban, the land of Krishna, where he spent the remaining years of his life as a religious recluse. He died in 1764, and Bani Thani a year later. His son, Sardar Singh, ruled for two years only; Sardar Singh's successor being a minor, Bahadur Singh, the ambitious brother, virtually governed the state until 1781.

The hallmark of Kishangarh painting used for the portrayal of Radha and Krishna is an elongated face with a receding forehead, arched eyebrows, lotus-like eyes slightly tinged with pink, a sharp, pointed nose, thin sensitive lips and a pointed chin. Radha is decked with ornaments and wears a gold-embroidered transparent wrap with a curl of hair partly framing her face. Her smile, supposedly that of Bani Thani, is enigmatic; some have said it is that of an Indian Mona Lisa. Her eyes reflect the Sanskrit ideal of feminine beauty, which compares them to a lotus. Krishna is her perfect counterpart; he is painted light blue, wears an orange turban and earrings with pearls. They appear together in Plate 20, one of the most striking of all Indian paintings.

Nihal Chand, who is assumed to have developed the portrayal of Radha and Krishna, continued to work at Kishangarh for more than sixteen years after the abdication of Sawant Singh. Archer suggests that his best work was done in the period between 1765 and 1780.<sup>2</sup> The death of this unusual pair, an ascetic king and a lovely woman, led to their apotheosis. Indians, usually having little of either, have unfailing

<sup>2</sup>W. G. Archer, Review of *Kishangarh Painting* by Dickinson and Khandalavala in *Lalit Kalā*, No. 6 (October 1959), p. 88.

admiration for those who renounce worldly power and wealth for higher purpose. (This extended to modern times and Edward VIII. The respect he won in India for giving up his throne for the love of a woman would not have been his had he continued to reign.)

But this was not a world of asceticism and self-denial. The Rajas of Kishangarh were the followers of the Vallabhacharya cult. This holds that God is to be sought amid the enjoyment of life, not in the mortification of the flesh. Radha and Krishna are the symbols of the human soul; their love sums up the loves of mankind. In this fashion a new world is created which is infinitely beautiful. "This magic world is not unreal or fanciful, but a world of imagination and eternity, visible to all who do not refuse to see with the transfiguring eyes of love."<sup>3</sup>

Kishangarh painting, like others, draws on incidents from the *Bhagavata Purana*. Plate 21, by Nihal Chand, which shows Krishna lifting the mountain Govardhana, is an example. When Krishna was in Vraja, he saw the cowherds making preparations to celebrate the festival of Indra, the Aryan God of Rain. When Krishna asked his foster father Nanda about the significance of Indra and his worship, Nanda replied, "Indra is the Lord of Rain, by whose favor grass, water and food are produced, trees blossom and fruit, and all living beings remain in happiness." To this Krishna said, "We are dwellers in woods, and it is the mountains and forests who nourish us. He who nourishes, his worship alone is proper. So let us worship the woods, streams, and the mountains." Thus the worship of rain was halted.

Narada, the sage, whose main role was to create dissensions among the Gods by tale-bearing, promptly informed Indra that in Vraja he was no longer being worshiped. Indra was naturally infuriated and set in motion the hosts of annihilating clouds, called *samvartaka*, which appear at the time of the deluge of the Universe. As a result Vraja was submerged under a torrent of rain. Cows began to shiver in the cold, and the cowherds and cowgirls sought refuge in Krishna. Krishna was equal to the occasion. He lifted Govardhana mountain with his little finger, and all the inhabitants of Vraja came with their cattle and were sheltered beneath it. Krishna continued this feat of weight-lifting for seven days, thus protecting the cowherds, cowgirls and cattle. Indra came on his white elephant to try to infuse courage in his cloud armies, but was compelled to acknowledge defeat.

One should notice the carefully balanced composition of this painting, the effect gained by the repetition of the stylized faces of the girls, cowherds and cows, and how the sinuous lightning decorates the sky. All show the hand of a master.

The poetry of Sawant Singh provides the theme of some Kishangarh painting as does his enactment of the Radha-Krishna romance.

In Plate 22 Krishna, carrying a lotus, is offering a garland to Radha. She is

<sup>3</sup>Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting* (Oxford, 1916), Vol. I, p. 7.

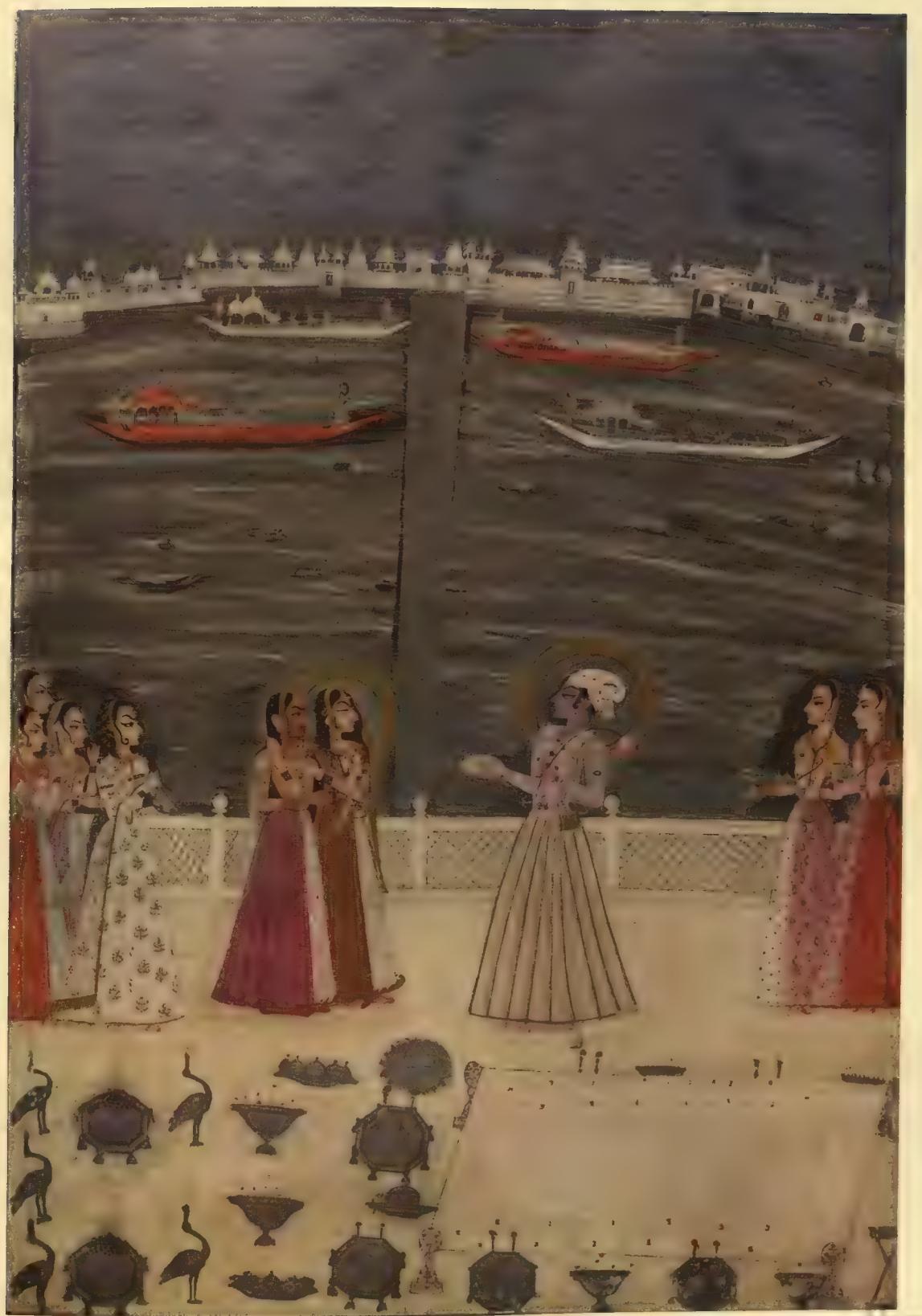


Plate 22. Krishna presenting flowers to Radha. Kishangarh, about 1755  
National Museum, New Delhi

standing in front of him receiving the caresses of a girl companion. Their nimbused heads are graceful and aristocratic. On the marble terrace is a bed with jewel-studded golden legs, and on one side are utensils of worship. In the background, marble pavilions of the palace are bathed in moonlight. Beautifully dressed, blazing with jewels, her face decorated by a serpentine lock of hair, Radha stands enraptured as if the entire secret of life has dawned upon her. Her figure is elongated, not only for rhythmic and sensuous effect but as a revelation of the Rajput character—proud, sensitive, serene, aristocratic and aloof.

“Krishna Gathering Lotuses in a Lake” (Plate 23) is thought to illustrate a poem by Sawant Singh. Radha is dressed in blue and her attendants are also sumptuously dressed in costumes that contrast strikingly with the white of the marble terrace. The blue sky, decorated by the moon, enhances the fairylike effect of the costumes. Finally, the solitary figure of Krishna floating like a naiad in the lake, his head nimbused with two rings of golden light, adds to the mystical dream quality of the painting. It is a superb product of the Kishangarh imagination.

Painting in Kishangarh continued into the nineteenth century. A series of paintings of the *Gita Govinda* was done in 1820 for Kalyan Singh (1798–1838).<sup>4</sup> They are rhythmic and sensuous—an expression of pleasure of the senses at the highest pitch. Bevies of lovely women, swooning with love, compete in attracting the attention of Krishna. But these paintings brought to a close the most inspired phase of painting in Rajasthan.

<sup>4</sup>Eric Dickinson and Karl Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Painting* (New Delhi, 1959), p. 48.



Plate 23. Krishna gathering lotuses in a lake. Kishangarh, about 1755  
*Maharaja Sardar Singh, Kishangarh*





The Palace, Amber

## CHAPTER XII

### JAIPUR

A SCRUB FOREST covers the flanks of Aravalli hills; it still echoes occasionally to the roar of a tiger. The Delhi-Jaipur road winds through these hills. After passing the forest there is a gentle ascent and then one comes upon a scene of fabulous grandeur. First a fairy palace and then a fort soar from the barren rocks. This is Amber, the old capital of Kachhwaha Rajputs of Jaipur State. The palace, with its massive walls capped at intervals with towers, turrets and pavilions, is reflected in the lake below. Higher, on the summit of a hill, is the fort of Jaigarh, the sentinel of the palace. In ancient times it was the state treasury and its hereditary guardians were the aboriginal Meenas of Kalikho.

The palace of Amber and its exquisite workmanship are the product of a long

growth. The uppermost block was built by Raja Bhagwan Das (1575–1592) and by Raja Man Singh (1590–1615). Man Singh was the foremost general of Akbar, and at different periods his governor in Kabul, Bengal, Bihar and the Deccan. Its architecture influenced Fatehpur-Sikri and Agra and the lesser capitals of Orchha and Datia and Mathura. Additions to the palace were made by Jai Singh I (1622–1668), and it was completed by Jai Singh II (1699–1743) in the early eighteenth century.

This palace was a great center of Rajput history and culture. From the place where one dismounts on arriving—the visitor still arrives by elephant—a staircase leads to a great courtyard, in which is the Hall of Public Audience with double rows of columns. Above are latticed galleries, and from behind the lace-like screens of red sandstone the ladies of the harem looked out and down on scenes of barbaric splendor. Below stood rows of elephants, carrying velvet-cushioned howdahs, with their broad foreheads painted blue, red, and yellow and their tusks mounted with gold rings. On one side were camels, magnificently caparisoned, gazing stupidly at the elephants as if jealous of their paint and trappings. On the other side were rows of Rajput warriors with beards parted in the middle, carrying shields of rhinoceros hide studded with steel knobs, and armed with swords, spears and matchlocks. Many of them bore bright pennons upon their spears or carried silken banners. In front, on prancing horses, were the nobles in red, yellow and green coats lined with golden tape. On the throne in the center sat the Raja clad in a coat of gold brocade, his neck covered with strings of enormous pearls and with a jeweled aigrette decorating his saffron turban. On either side sat his ministers and courtiers, and behind him stood his trusted servants waving fly-whisks with golden handles. The trumpeting of elephants, the blubbering of camels and the roll of drums made the air hideous with noise. At a distance, the common people jostled and pushed and shouted "*Jais*" and "*Ann data ghane shama*," meaning "Hail! O Giver of Bread, be merciful!"

The inner rooms of the palace are approached through a gently ascending ramp. Here are pavilions with latticed windows and rooms paneled in alabaster decorated with flowers in alto-relievo and inlaid with cornelian and bloodstone. The dining rooms are decorated with mural paintings showing the holy places of the Hindus, for it was auspicious to view these in the morning. The doors are of carved ivory or sandalwood. Like the miniature paintings they must be seen from close at hand; only then can one absorb their beauty. The walls and roofs of bedrooms are studded with small mirrors. When a candle is lighted and moved gently, the numerous reflections give an appearance of moving constellations of stars; the room as a whole simulates the firmament. The bathrooms are of creamy marble. Through the arches of carved alabaster and rows of slender columns one sees fountains shooting jets of water and spraying the jasmine, roses, *keora* and oranges, and the parterres of flowers. Peacocks with bright plumage once enlivened the gardens.

No furniture cluttered the rooms. The Ranis sat on carpets surrounded by a pile of cushions of silk and brocade. Or they reclined against cylindrical bolsters to converse and smoke hookahs or chew betel leaves.

Since the women lived in seclusion, it has been supposed that their existence was dull and monotonous. This was not so; they would not willingly have changed places with a present-day suburban housewife. Their day began with a bath in a secluded room; here the Rani was attended by maid-servants who assisted by holding towels, pouring water from silver ewers and rubbing her heels with soap. Then came the flower girls with baskets of flowers. Next followed a prayer ritual in which there was plentiful use of flowers and incense. After the prayers came an elaborate toilet, including combing of hair and donning of ornaments and leis of flowers. The ornaments were of gold studded with diamonds and in great variety, since the Rajputs believed that "women [should] be constantly supplied with ornaments, for if the wife be not elegantly attired, she will not exhilarate her husband. A wife gaily adorned, [means] the whole house is embellished."<sup>1</sup>

After meals the Ranis played dice with their handmaids. Maids formed a part of the dower and each Rani had at least a dozen lampholders, or *dewadharis*. Some of these were highly talented; Tod called them "damsels of wisdom and penetration." They entertained the Ranis with folk tales, ballads, songs and gossip and also massaged their legs. The Ranis amused themselves by watching tumbler pigeons, and they had parrots and mynahs that could repeat human speech in an uncanny manner.

Sometimes the royal ladies went hunting on horseback with the Raja. Ducks were hunted with falcons. Tigers and boars were shot from specially constructed perches near their watering places and such hunting scenes are shown in numerous paintings. Moreover, it was not an emotionally passive existence; life was spiced with intrigue, jealousy and conspiracy. Rani contended with Rani for the favor of the Raja and success and failure added greatly to the flavor of life.

The modern city of Jaipur, the present capital of Rajasthan some eight miles from Amber in the plain below, is one of the most interesting in India. It was founded in 1727 by Jai Singh II, also known as Sawai Jai Singh. This remarkable monarch was a scientist as well as a statesman. His chief scientific interest was astronomy, and he erected observatories at Jaipur, Delhi, Benares, Mathura and Ujjain. Finding instruments that were in use at the time, such as those of Ulug Beg, the royal astronomer of Samarkand, to be defective, he designed better ones. Through a Portuguese missionary he got in touch with Emmanuel, King of Portugal, and the king sent the astronomer Xavier de Silva to him with the tables of La Hire. Jai Singh compared the calculations of La Hire with his own and discovered errors. He determined the obliquity of the ecliptic and the latitude of Ujjain with an accuracy remarkable for the times.

His chief collaborator in astronomy was one Vidyadhar, who also aided him in planning the city of Jaipur. It was laid out on a grid pattern, with wide streets bisecting each other at right angles, and was protected by a crenelated wall pierced by eight gates. Paris inspired some of the design. The Palace of Winds, built by Sawai

<sup>1</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (London, 1829-1832), Vol. I, p. 641.



Plate 24. Krishna's Ring Dance. Jaipur, about 1800  
*The Maharaja of Jaipur, Jaipur Museum*

Pratap Singh, has five stories, consisting entirely of latticed windows through which the ladies of the palace watched processions and festivals. The City Palace, with its gardens and fountains and its rose-pink color like that of all other buildings, is highly impressive. In the shops of Jaipur, jewelers, enamelers, manufacturers of brassware and dyers of cloth still ply their ancient trades. They continue to produce articles of beauty and individuality.

The rulers of Jaipur from earliest times maintained cordial relationships with the Mughal emperors. They were firm adherents of the formula that who cannot be overcome must be joined. Raja Bhar Mal (1548–1575) married his daughter to Akbar, who gave her the title of Maryam Zamani, or Mary of the Age. His son, Bhagwant Das (1575–1592), was a friend of Akbar and saved the Emperor's life at the battle of Sarnal. As a reward, he was made Governor of the Punjab and he married his daughter to Prince Salim, who afterward became Jahangir. As noted earlier in this chapter, Man Singh, the son of Bhagwant Das, was Akbar's most trusted general. These close relations with the Mughal court strongly affected the artistic life at Amber. Painting for many years followed the Mughal style. It was work of high distinction, and in spite of local refinements much painting done at Jaipur has been attributed to the Mughal courts or has been called Mughal painting. But it did not remain always so. Under Pratap Singh (1779–1803) the Mughal influence receded, and a genuine Jaipur-Rajput style made its appearance. This was the golden age of painting in Jaipur.

Some fifty artists were employed by Pratap Singh, who was also a scholar and a poet, a prolific author and an ardent follower of Krishna. His favorite amusement was to dress as Krishna and to have his concubines act the part of Krishna's *gopis* in a pastoral dance. In Jaipur Palace there is a large ( $15 \times 6$  feet) painting by Sahib Ram which shows him so dressed with two groups of female musicians at his side playing *tabla* drums and the stringed instruments called *tanpuras*. In "Krishna's Ring Dance," one of the masterpieces of the period which we show in Plate 24, the model for Krishna was probably provided by Pratap Singh himself.

The legend of the Ring Dance is told in *The Prema-Sagara, or Ocean of Love*. It was the month of October when the rains had ended and the sky was clear. On seeing the sky sprinkled with stars and the beauty of the full moon, Krishna remembered that he had promised the cowgirls that he would dance with them in the autumn. So he played the flute. Hearing its sound the cowgirls hurried to meet him. They found Krishna decked with ornaments and wearing a crown of peacock feathers. He took the cowgirls with him and went to the bank of the Jumna. The girls wore elegant dresses and ornaments; taking lutes and timbrels and intoxicated with love and passion, they abandoned modesty and began to sing and dance. Krishna, with his favorite girl in the center, resembled the moon in the starry firmament. The *Ocean of Love* thus describes the dance:



Plate 25. Revelry. Jaipur, about 1810. *The Maharaja of Jaipur, Jaipur Museum*

The splendour of the dancing circle was yielding four times more brilliance than the moon's orb; all around it the sand was spread out like moon-light; the sweetest of cool scented airs was blowing; and on one side, the verdure of the dense forest was deriving increased beauty from the brilliant night. (As the frenzy of the dance reached its climax) the breasts of some were uncovered; there the diadems of others had slipped . . . the pearl necklaces being . . . broken were falling; (and also) the wild-flower wreaths. The drops of perspiration on [their] foreheads were glittering like strings of pearls; and the ringlets on the most fair faces of the cowherdesses were dishevelled as if young snakes, from lust of nectar, having flown up, had attached [themselves] to the moon . . .

In this way, singing [and] dancing on, practising various kinds of coquetry [and] ogling, they were giving [and] receiving enjoyment, and mutually pleased, laughing merrily, embracing repeatedly, [they] were making offerings of clothes [and] ornaments . . .<sup>2</sup>

To see the sight, the gods appeared in the sky on their aerial vehicles, the Sun, the Moon, Indra, Brahma and Shiva, and rained down flowers on the dancing circles of Krishna and the cowgirls. Narada and gandharvas made music, and there was such harmony of *ragas* and *raginis* that the wind and water ceased to flow, and the moon and the stars in the sky trembled with joy.

In Plate 24 the scene is observed as from one of the aerial vehicles of the gods. Figures of the cowgirls clad in black, who are watching the dance, are the setting for the two dancing circles of women in green and yellow. Krishna and Radha are the center of a solar system; one can sense its cosmic rhythm. The planets revolve around Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, who as the sun is the source and support of all life.

Under Jagat Singh II (1803-1818) painting continued in the style that had been initiated under Pratap Singh. The new ruler has been described as the most dissolute prince of his race or age, a title not easily earned. He was profoundly infatuated with a Muslim concubine, Ras Kafoor, or Essence of Camphor, and made her his queen and gave her half of Amber. He also rode with her on the same elephant and struck coins in her name. The chiefs followed his example, and debauches with dancing girls and dance and music became their chief amusements. Plate 25, painted for Jagat Singh II, is a charming night scene entitled "Revelry." It reflects the temper of this gay, sensuous, but quite possibly very agreeable reign.

In Plate 26 we perhaps see Jagat Singh's favorite queen or concubine relaxing in a garden of mangoes during the rainy season. The garden is screened from the vulgar gaze by a red curtain, called a *kanat*, supported by bamboos at suitable intervals. On the horizon are dark blue monsoon clouds, and a peacock is spreading his

<sup>2</sup>Frederic Pincott, ed., *The Prema-Sagara, or Ocean of Love* (London, 1897), p. 87. The words in brackets are Pincott's; those in parentheses are the authors'.



Plate 26. Jagat Singh's favorite on a picnic. Jaipur, about 1815. *The Maharaja of Jaipur*, Jaipur Museum

tail feathers in a gorgeous fan. The women of the harem are swimming in the lake, swinging from the branches of mango trees laden with orange-colored fruit and playing music. The woman is resting against a bolster listening to music and watching a nautch.

Painting in the Pratap Singh style continued under Jai Singh III (1818–1835), but it lacked inspiration. By the time of the accession of Madho Singh II (1834–1880), British power had become paramount in India. From Western industrialism and enterprise the old arts, based on skill and patience, received a heavy blow. The Rajas, following the example of the new rulers, filled their palaces with mechanical toys, clocks, Belgian mirrors and marble cupids. At Jaipur the albums of old paintings for a long while languished in obscure corners of the palace storehouses, gathering dust. Now they form one of the world's most important collections.



Ruins of Raja's Palace at Basohli

#### CHAPTER XIV

### THE PUNJAB HILLS: BASOHLI

THE RAJPUT STATES of the Punjab Hills, a dozen in all, were minor principalities in the valleys on the southern edge of the Himalayas or—in some cases—farther within this great mountain barrier. Their rulers came to the hills between the seventh and the twelfth centuries from Rajasthan and central India, and, after overwhelming the local barons, called Ranas, established themselves in their place. In the middle of the seventeenth century, while painters were at work far to the west in Bundi and Mewar, another talented group found service with these minor rulers of the Punjab Hills. The first and most dramatic example of this work was at Basohli.

Basohli was a tiny state consisting of only seventy-four villages. Its founder

was Bhog Pal (A.D. 765), a son of a Raja of Kulu (of the beautiful Kulu Valley), who had subdued Rana Billo, a feudal chief who once had ruled this area. Bhog Pal founded Balaur, the ancient capital of Basohli. A descendant, Bhupat Pal (1598–1635), who was a contemporary of Shah Jahan, shifted the capital to Basohli on the Ravi. Bhupat Pal, a man of giant stature, sustained his great frame by consuming mammoth quantities of goat's flesh and rice. There was rivalry between Basohli and the neighboring states; in the course of endless warfare they nibbled compulsively at each other's territory. Eventually, Jagat Singh, Raja of Nurpur, a favorite of Shah Jahan and an accomplished intriguer, managed to have the vast Bhupat Pal imprisoned. Jagat Singh then occupied Basohli. On his release from prison after a detention of fourteen years, Bhupat Pal recovered Basohli from the Nurpur garrison. However, in Delhi in 1635 Jagat Singh, in keeping with contemporary procedure, was able to have Bhupat Pal assassinated.

Bhupat Pal was succeeded by his son Sangram Pal (1635–1673), another physically compelling prince. Sangram Pal was invited to the court of Delhi, and the queens of Shah Jahan, on hearing of his beauty, expressed a desire to see him. So he was taken to the female apartments by Dara Shikoh and, since he was strictly on exhibit, a napkin was tied over his eyes. The queens protested, saying, with some possible exaggeration, that the beauty of a man lay in his eyes. They asked that the bandage be removed. This was done and they were delighted with the result. After loading him with presents, they allowed him to leave for Basohli. There he won twenty-two battles, married twenty-two wives and died without leaving issue. He was succeeded by his younger brother Hindal Pal, an imbecile.

The town of Basohli is situated on the right bank of the Ravi, on a fertile plateau 2170 feet in altitude. Its present-day population of about 7000 live in houses built of stone and clay with flat roofs. Dominating this beehive of houses is the massive ruin of the palace of the Rajas. The palace was started by Bhupat Pal in 1635 and was enlarged by his successors. Once it was the wonder of the Hills. G. T. Vigne, the English traveler who passed through Basohli in 1835, was struck by its grandeur, and thought it one of the finest buildings he had seen in the East. Its turrets, parapets, projecting windows and balconies reminded him of the castles of England and Germany. "When viewed at the distance of a few miles from the path to Jammu, it rises in relief from the dark masses of the lower ranges, with a grandeur that I thought not inferior to that of Heidelberg; while with reference to more general effect the line of snowy peaks, which are seen peering over the mountains immediately around it are sufficient to render its relative position immensely superior."<sup>1</sup>

Though it is likely that painting at Basohli developed during the rule of Sangram Pal, as a product of his favor in the Mughal court, there is no authentic evidence of this. But from 1678 to 1693 the state was ruled by an enlightened prince,

<sup>1</sup>Godfrey T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo . . . and the Himalaya . . .* (London, 1842), Vol. I, p. 17.

Kirpal Pal, who was a scholar and patron of literature and art. Under Kirpal Pal, Basohli developed the new, distinctive and magnificent style by which the state is famous. It is characterized by strong use of primary colors—red, mustard yellow, and blue—and by faces with receding foreheads and great expressive eyes like lotus petals. Trees are stylized and are used as decorative symbols. The horizon is high and warm yellow fills the background, conveying an impression of the bright sunlight of India. Raised white paint is used for painting pearl necklaces. Diamond-shaped pieces cut from shining green beetle wings are used to simulate emeralds in the plentiful ornaments. This is what has come to be called Basohli painting.

The sources of the style are still unknown. It may have originated in other Hill states of the Punjab during the reign of Aurangzeb when artists were in disfavor at the Mughal court of Delhi. But, except for clothing that is in the fashion of the court of that period, it has little in common with Mughal spirit and expression. Certainly it was not nurtured by wealth. Though the Basohli Rajas were housed in considerable magnificence, this was by no means a prosperous state at the close of the seventeenth century. The rulers are shown in the paintings in plebeian dress; they sit on cotton carpets to smoke hookahs. There are common features with Mewar painting of the period—the strong primary colors, the stylized treatment of vegetation, and the manner in which cattle are painted. But the Basohli facial formula is unique; there is nothing like it elsewhere.

The most popular theme of Basohli painting was from Bhanu Datta's *Rasamanjari*, or *Bouquet of Delight*. Bhanu Datta was a Maithili Brahman who lived in the sixteenth century in the Tirhut area of Bihar. Written in Sanskrit, his *Rasamanjari* deals with heroes and heroines and lovers and sweethearts and classifies them in accordance with age, experience, physical, mental and emotional characteristics. It sheds a rare light on contemporary social conditions. The population of India then consisted of a small but affluent upper class of Rajas and their courtiers and generals, a small and frugal middle class consisting of moneylenders and shopkeepers and a very numerous lower class of peasants, artisans and landless workers living in poverty. The *Rasamanjari* was produced for the well-to-do minority who knew Sanskrit.

Polygamy was the rule among the rich. It is evident that jealousy was a grave affliction, and the husband had to use his wits to avoid unseemly scenes in his household. A successful lover who has two wives must make love to his favorite without exciting the anger of the other. In one case stealth is employed: "When the lover, raising his head, saw both of his lotus-eyed nayikas sleeping together, one of whom was veiling her face, he stealthily drew near the other and gently pulled her sari to wake her up." Another lover feigns anger and adopts the stratagem of sending the less attractive wife on an errand. "The displeased lover looked at both of his nayikas. He made one of them go out to the wood to fetch flowers. Then he embraced the other who was looking at him with drowsy eyes and a sweet smile on her lips."

Some of the verses of the *Rasamanjari* are pleasantly erotic. Lotuses open when



Plate 27. Krishna with clothes of the cowgirls. Mankot, about 1700  
Punjab Museum, Chandigarh

the sun rises and close at night. A new wife does not want the night of love to come to a close, and hence this tale: "The fugitive night flees as the lover busily consummates one love-rite after another—now sucking the nether lip, now doing homage to the breasts, now loosening the braid while the lips do their service, now removing the last veiling garments and losing himself in complete abandon. Drowsily he asks if the day has dawned. The nayika, lest the morning should bring the love-play to a close, hastily covers the lotuses in her ears so that opening they may not announce the day."<sup>2</sup>

In 1694–1695 the Basohli artist Devi Das did a magnificent series of paintings of the *Rasamanjari*. His and other versions are now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares, the Dogra Art Gallery in Jammu, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and in many private collections.

Another favorite of Basohli artists is the story of the love of Prince Madhava for Malati, the daughter of a minister. A large series of paintings illustrating this story is in the National Museum at New Delhi. This Sanskrit drama is by Bhavabhuti, who lived at the court of Yasovarman of Kanauj in the first half of the eighth century A.D. Madhava and Malati are both attending a class together in a school, and Malati becomes fascinated by the beauty of Madhava. One day when the teacher had not come, Malati raises her eyes from her book and glances at Madhava, who is absorbed in his studies. Overcome by longing, she takes a piece of paper, rolls it into a ball and throws it at him. Madhava looks up in anger, but when he sees Malati's lovely form, which the poet described as "a casket of snares," he falls in love with her. It is a simple tribute to a forthright approach.

As in Rajasthani painting, Krishna worship is an important theme of Basohli painting. In this cult, as we have already mentioned, the soul's devotion to God is represented by Radha's self-abandonment to Krishna, and as G. A. Grierson remarks in a notable sentence, "all the hot blood of oriental passion is encouraged to pour forth one mighty flood of praise and prayer to the Infinite Creator, who waits with loving out-stretched arms to receive the worshipper into his bosom, and to convey him safely to eternal rest across the seemingly shoreless Ocean of Existence."<sup>3</sup>

The *Bhagavata Purana* was another popular text. A series of paintings, painted at Mankot, is in the collection of the Punjab Museum, Chandigarh. From this series we reproduce Plate 27, showing Krishna hiding in the crown of a kadamba tree after having stolen the clothes of the cowgirls who were bathing in the river Jumna. The nude cowgirls are imploring him to return their clothes. When ultimately in the journey to the Alone the soul meets the Creator, it goes in all its nakedness. This painting symbolizes the nakedness of the soul in the presence of God.

<sup>2</sup>Mohinder Singh Randhawa, "A Note on Rasamanjari Paintings from Basohli," *Roopa-Lekha*, Vol. XXXI (1960), No. 1, pp. 21, 22, 18.

<sup>3</sup>Sir George Abraham Grierson, ed., *The Satsaiya of Bihari* (Calcutta, 1896), p. 8.



Plate 28. Lady forsaken and lovelorn. From a Ragamala. Basohli, about 1720

P. G. Mitter, Calcutta

Another fine series of Ragamala paintings in Basohli style is distributed in various collections, including that of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the N. C. Mehta Collection in the Gujarat Museum, Ahmedabad. From this series we reproduce Plate 28, a richly imaginative painting of the Ragini Dhanasri. It shows a lady holding the branch of a tree and carrying a lotus bud as she yearns for her absent lover. It is spring, and the exuberant mood of nature is in contrast with the suffering of the woman. One of her companions plays music but does nothing to lighten her mood. We leave her with her longing unappeased.



The Kangra Valley

## CHAPTER XIV

### KANGRA

INDIAN PAINTING, which had its birth in the caves of Ajanta about the second century B.C., evolved into Mughal style under the influence of Persian painting in the sixteenth century and ultimately blossomed into the art of the Kangra Valley in the Punjab Himalayas. There it developed its most romantic form and there in the nineteenth century it came to an end.

Kangra is the northernmost district of the Punjab State, as till recently it was. The Kangra Valley is bounded by the Dhauladhar, a 16,000-foot-high snow-covered range to the north, and by a series of parallel ranges of low hills to the south which separate it from the plains of India. It extends for about fifty miles at an altitude of 3000 to 4000 feet and is covered with terraced fields and irrigated by small

canals that descend from the perennial snows. High on the flanks of the mountain are forests of oak and pine; lower down are mangoes, plantains, bamboos and pipal trees mixed with cherries, medlars, and wild roses. Dotting the fields, which produce rich crops of rice, wheat and linseed, are the cottages of the villagers with sloping slate-covered roofs surrounded by groves of bauhinia, bamboo and plantain. The orchid-like mauve flowers of bauhinia, the pink and white roses and the white sprays of medlars make it a land of enchantment in spring. But in all seasons there is a charming tranquillity to the valley; the homesteads buried in greenery have a soothing calm. Barnes, the first British administrator of the valley, said he knew no spot in the Himalayas of such beauty and grandeur.

The kingdom of Kangra was the most ancient state of the Punjab Himalayas. The original seat of its rulers was Multan on the plains. But after the great battle of the *Mahabharata*, they lost their territory in the western Punjab and migrated to the valley. On an isolated mountain girt by two rivers they built the fort of Kangra. Stone was piled upon stone to raise a towering and impregnable stronghold, from which they ruled the valley for centuries. It remains a great sight.

However, the birthplace of the Kangra Valley school of painting, which came to hold sway over the entire Punjab Hills, was at Guler, the entrance to the valley bordering the plains. The state of Guler was founded by Raja Hari Chand of Kangra in 1405. He had gone out hunting, got separated from his companions and, when it was dark, had fallen into a well. After a number of days he was rescued by a merchant who was passing by with a train of mules. On learning that in his absence his Ranis, presuming him to be dead, had committed suttee—had immolated themselves by fire—and that his younger brother had ascended the throne, Hari Chand concluded he would be a cause of considerable inconvenience if he were to return to Kangra. So he proceeded to the present site of Haripur, where he built a fortress and founded the kingdom of Guler. Since it was the seat of the senior branch of the family, the head of the Katoch Rajputs, Guler took precedence over Kangra on ceremonial occasions. With the conquest of the Kangra Valley by Jahangir, who subdued the Kangra fort in 1620, the Rajas of Guler became the vassals of the Mughal emperors.

When Nadir Shah invaded northern India from Persia and conquered Delhi in 1739, Guler was ruled by Dalip Singh (1694–1744). Artists trained in the Mughal style, and not less interested than other men in self-preservation, came to the Punjab Hills as refugees from the Persians. Thus was founded the Kangra school of painting. Among them was a family of Kashmiri Brahmins, the brothers Manak and Nain Sukh, sons of one Pandit Seu. Both were talented painters. Manak reached Guler; Nain Sukh proceeded to Jammu, now the winter capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. A number of portraits of Bishan Singh, the elder son of Dalip Singh, survive. They are painted against a background of low curved hills, a typical feature of Guler paintings. Bishan Singh died during the lifetime of his father; he was succeeded as heir by his younger brother, Govardhan Chand, in 1744.



Plate 29. Lovers watching rain clouds. Kangra, about 1780  
Mrs. John F. Kennedy, New York City

Govardhan Chand (1744–1773) was an enthusiastic patron of art. Numerous portraits of the ruler and his family, acquired (by the senior author of this book) from the Raja of Guler, are now in the Punjab Museum in Chandigarh. Beyond the fact of this patronage, and that he once made war over a horse, little is known of this ruler. The annals of the hill Rajas are also short and simple. Govardhan Chand was succeeded in 1773 by his son, Parkash Chand, who abdicated in favor of his son, Bhup Singh, in 1790 and died in 1820. Parkash Chand, like his father, continued the patronage of painting.

Meanwhile, in the state of Kangra proper, there rose a remarkable ruler, Sansar Chand (1775–1823). His grandfather, Ghamband Chand (1751–1774), had already made Kangra the paramount state in the valley and founded the magic little capital of Tira Sujanpur on a glade and hill above the Beas River. Sansar Chand was only ten years of age when he assumed power in 1775; he became the most renowned ruler of Kangra, and after Govardhan Chand of Guler, the most generous patron of art.

In 1786 Sansar Chand occupied the fort of Kangra. It was impregnable to the artillery of the times, and hence was the symbol of power in the Punjab Hills: "he who holds the Kangra fort holds the Hills." Sansar Chand thus became the suzerain of the valley and went on to conquer the neighboring Hill states. The years following were the most glorious in the history of Kangra. Artists, dancing girls, singers and storytellers flocked to the court. And skilled artists came from the declining court of Parkash Chand of Guler to Tira Sujanpur to enjoy the patronage of Sansar Chand. Two paintings that survive show him examining pictures in company with his courtiers.

In 1805 the Gurkhas from Nepal besieged Kangra fort. They plundered the valley and for three years a state of anarchy prevailed. Cultivation was abandoned, grass grew up in the towns and tigresses whelped in the streets. Sansar Chand was compelled to seek the aid of a rival, the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh from the plains below. In 1809, the Sikh army attacked the Gurkhas and chased them across the Sutlej. The price of this aid, however, was the cession of Kangra fort to the Sikhs and acceptance of their overlordship.

Reacting to his misfortune, Sansar Chand from 1810 onward led a retired life at Nadaun and Alampur. Along with his daily routine of prayers, he spent his time listening to music, watching performances of the dance, playing chess and examining paintings. Supplementing his three queens, he married a beautiful shepherd girl whom he saw while hunting below the Dhauladhar mountain, and he spent his last days in the company of a dancing girl, Jamalo by name, in the palace at Nadaun overlooking the Beas. Visitors were not received. Courtiers, in what must have been a dry ceremony, were told to salute a kamal tree at the entrance of the palace and then depart. In 1820 William Moorcroft, an English traveler, saw Sansar Chand at Alampur. He mentions that the Raja was still fond of dancing, had many artists in his employ and possessed a large collection of pictures.



Plate 30. Damayanti receiving her ornaments. Guler, about 1780  
Maharaja Karan Singh, Jammu

From Guler artists went not only to Tira Sujanpur but to other Hill states, including Basohli and Chamba. The new Kangra style was popular at Basohli during the last years of the rule of Amrit Pal (1757-1776). Nikka, son of the artist Nain Sukh, worked for Raj Singh of Chamba. (Manak and his son, Khushala, are believed to have migrated to Tira Sujanpur to work under the patronage of Sansar Chand.) With the decline and fall of Sansar Chand, some of his artists migrated in turn to Mandi, Suket and Garhwal. The daughters of Sansar Chand carried the best paintings of Kangra to Garhwal when they went there to marry Raja Sudarshan Shah in 1831. Here a late school of painting developed under the patronage of Sudarshan Shah and his princesses, and it seems certain that the school drew on artists from the court of Tira Sujanpur.

Commenting on the best art of Guler and Kangra, J. C. French observes: "Beautiful as is the line of the art of Guler and Kangra, its colour is equally fine. Clear, pure and bright, it is yet of a gossamer lightness and delicacy. The artists of Guler and Kangra had the colours of the dawn and the rainbow on their palettes."<sup>1</sup>

Guler painting is marked by liquid grace and delicacy. The drawing is delicate and precise. The colors, which emphasize cool blues and greens, are handled with skill and restraint. Almost all that survives is of high quality.

In Tira Sujanpur there were two distinct types of paintings. There is first a pictorial record of Sansar Chand and his court. He is shown sitting by the riverside, listening to music, watching dancers, presiding over festivals, practicing tent-pegging and archery, and drilling troops. Much of this work is crude; it may be that of inferior artists whose function was that of pictorial diarists. The second and much better type is on the themes of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Gita Govinda*, the *Sat Sai*, of Nala and Damayanti in the *Mahabharata*, of the Ragamala series, and the "Twelve Months." This is uniformly of high quality and parallels that of Guler in beauty of line and color. It could be the work of artists who migrated from Guler to the court of Sansar Chand. To suggest, as Douglas Barrett does,<sup>2</sup> that nearly all the best paintings were done at Guler and few or none at Tira Sujanpur, Alampur and Nadaun, where Sansar Chand lived, is surely an error. Indeed, some of these paintings show the landscape of Tira Sujanpur and Alampur.

As we have observed, Rajput and Brahman women of the Punjab Hills are remarkably lovely—they are slim and graceful, with dark liquid eyes and chiseled features. A further and notable feature of Kangra paintings are these lovely women. An example is shown here as the frontispiece. In this painting a princess is seated on a *chauki* smoking a hookah, while a maid-servant is washing her feet. Three of her maids are holding a white sheet to screen her. The picture is composed in a roundel, and the background is painted in gold. Indian poets, not uniquely, took delight in the subject of women bathing. The artists then brought these fancies to visual life. In

<sup>1</sup>J. C. French, Review of W. G. Archer's *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills*, in *Art and Letters*, Vol. XXVI (1952), No. 1, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas E. Barrett and Basil Gray, *Painting of India* ([Geneva?] 1963), pp. 180-187.

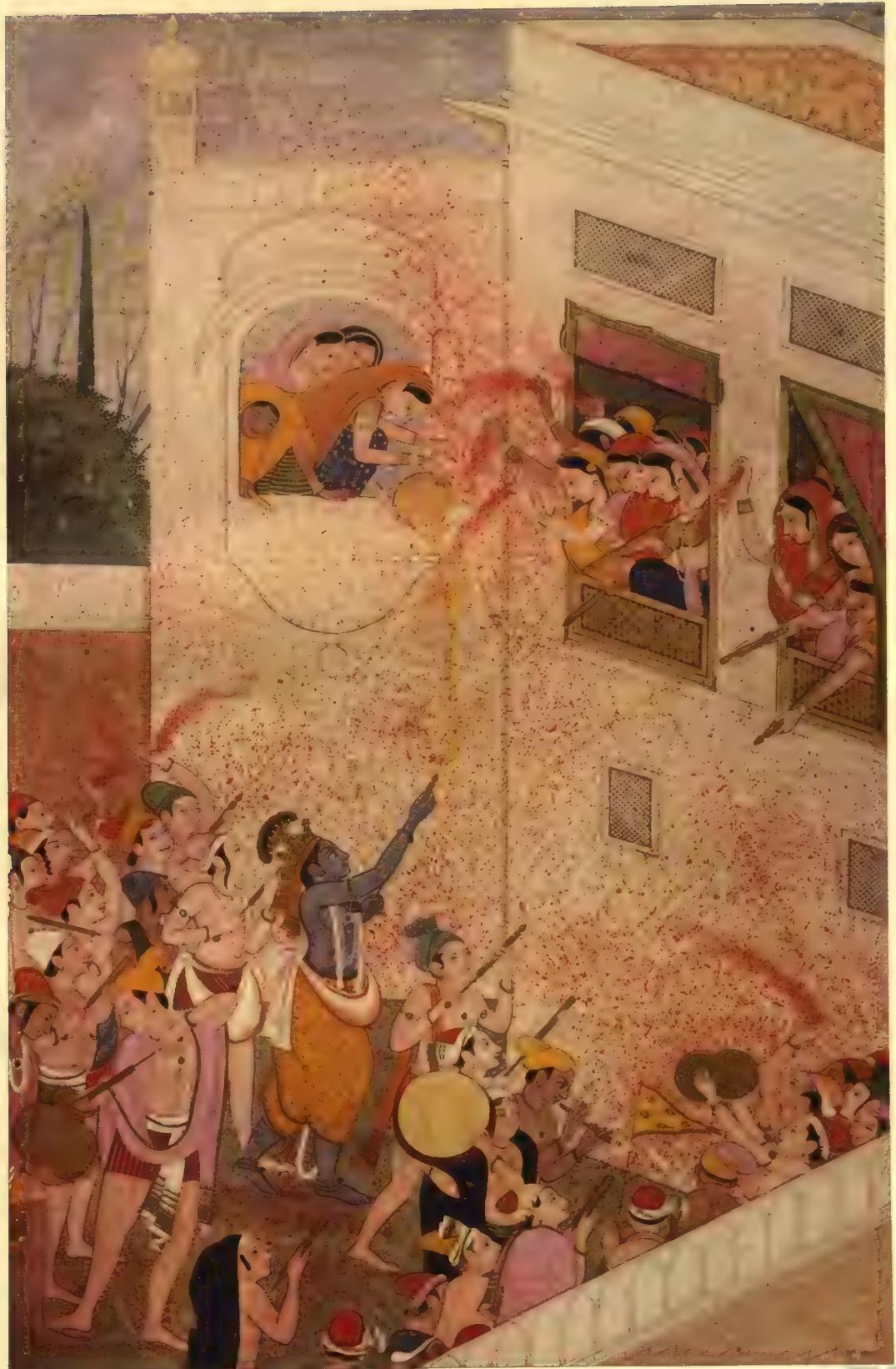


Plate 31. Krishna playing Holi. By Gur Sahai. Guler, about 1785  
Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares

another variation on this theme a woman is shown wringing her hair after a bath and a swan is greedily drinking the falling drops of water. A swan is supposed to eat pearls, and this is the compliment he pays, in pleasant error, to the lady.

Such Hindu rhetoricians as Keshav Das arranged love into two classes—"love in separation" and "love in union."<sup>3</sup> According to Keshav Das, love is possible when its object is seen in real life, in a picture or in a dream. It is born in the eyes, is fed by gazing and is sealed through courtship and the conversation of lovers. When lovers are looking at each other or touching each other, whether lightly or comprehensively, it is love in union. Love in separation is the frustration of unfulfilled union. Its conditions are ones of longing, anxiety, reminiscence, agitation, delirium and fainting. Love in union is greatly to be preferred.

Plate 29 shows the tranquillity and pleasure of love in union. These are evident from the posture and aspect of the lovers as, seated in a balcony, they watch a flight of cranes against the dark monsoon clouds. Below the balcony in the painting is a frightened peacock. Its tail feathers have a wonderful sheen of blue and green dashed with gold. In a corner are mango trees laden with ripe orange-colored fruit. The amber of the youthful lovers is in happy contrast to the white of the marble. The palace, with its lace-like marble, is strongly reminiscent of Sansar Chand's palace on the hilltop at Tira Sujanpur overlooking the Beas and that of Alampur across the river. The ruin of this palace, with a pavilion and balcony like that in the picture, is still to be seen. The authors climbed the steep hill to visit it on the day we decided to write this book.

The story of Prince Nala and Damayanti, his beloved, is told in the *Mahabharata*. And in the second half of the twelfth century at Kanauj the poet Sriharsha wrote a Sanskrit poem, the *Naishadhacharita*, in which he describes their blissful marriage at Nala's capital, Naishadh. Plate 30, a painting from Guler, tells part of the story. Damayanti is shown seated in a pavilion overlooking a mountain-girt lake. All colors are softened by the night. It is a painting on which the eye must dwell at length.

In the last week of February or early in March when winter ends and spring season begins, Holi festival is celebrated all over India. There is—or once was—an amiable license for misbehavior in the manner of a mild saturnalia. Groups carrying pails of colored water and armed with syringes patrol the streets and spatter all passers-by with the colors, especially red. Friends visit to throw colored water on each other. They also rub red vegetable dye mixed with mica powder on each other's faces and embrace; clothes and faces soon become one mass of red. Villagers, and the more exuberant people in the towns, drink copiously and roam about singing ribald songs and offering affection. The festival concludes with the burning of Holi, when fires are lighted into which crimson powder is thrown. In Plate 31, Krishna and his cowherd companions are playing Holi. The boys are throwing red water at the girls; the girls,

<sup>3</sup>Mohinder Singh Randhawa, *Kangra Paintings on Love* (New Delhi, 1962), p. 121.



Plate 32. The month of April. Kangra, about 1790  
*The Raja of Lambagraon, Kangra Valley*

who are very pretty, are retaliating with zest. Some of the boys are also throwing missiles containing crimson powder; others are beating cymbals and playing on the flute. In addition to its grace the painting is a good document on how Holi was celebrated in the eighteenth century in the Punjab Hills.

Another subject of the Kangra artists was the "Twelve Months." This was more than the vision of changing seasons and landscape; the artists told also of the emotions that the season inspired in those so fortunate as to be in love. A famous series on the twelve months was once in the possession of Maharaja Sansar Chand. Plate 32 is from the collection of one of his distinguished descendants. It is the month of April. The lovers are seated on a terrace, and the hillside in the background is covered with flowers. The lady is imploring her lover not to leave on his travels and leave her alone when the spring is in its prime. The painting catches the universal spirit of spring.

In our account of Mewar painting, we showed in Plate 11 a picture of cowgirls searching for Krishna on the night of the full moon. Plate 33, by a master artist of the Punjab Hills, deals with the same theme in the Kangra style. In this painting Krishna manifests himself to the bewildered girls, who had sought him in vain. He is wearing a white garland and a yellow wrap and the girls are spellbound by his beauty. He stands surrounded by them as the moon is surrounded by the stars. The soft radiance of the moon is handled with great effect in this painting. The trees with their swaying branches are also of great importance for they symbolize the intense desire of the girls. The flow of the line conveys a sense of rhythmical exaltation consonant with the spirit of the great Sanskrit classic.

Hindu society, as earlier noted, has long been puritanical; it tolerates no laxness in sexual morals. The Vedas, epics and the ancient Sanskrit literature all tell of strict and austere standards in the relations between man and woman. The ideal wife, typified by such heroines as Sita and Damayanti, were loyal to their husbands in the most severe adversity and in face of the greatest temptation. Early marriage excluded premarital intercourse; adultery was very rare. Yet this society cherished the incarnation of a God whose conduct was by these standards quite scandalous. Krishna steals the clothes of *gopis* while they are bathing, relishes their nakedness and resulting embarrassment, dances with the wives of other men in the moonlight and then frolics with them in the river. How is this erotic behavior to be explained?

The explanation is spiritual rather than moral. God is not a stern father in heaven, but a handsome youth, a lover, a carefree pastoral figure. He behaves as stern and austere men wish they might and would were they not confined by man-made morality. In some manner Krishna is the surrogate of the secret fancies and longings of a stern people. Also, the essential element in devotion to God, or *Bhakti*, is self-forgetfulness and self-surrender. This is realized when a man makes love to a woman. Then the soul is brought in communion with absolute spiritual reality.

In much Eastern mysticism God is realized through feeling rather than



Plate 33. Krishna with cowgirls in moonlight. Kangra, about 1790. G. K. Kanoria, Calcutta

knowledge. Those who seek Him in the sterile sands of intellectuality seek in vain. Nor is mere brilliance of intellect highly regarded; emotion is the key to the realization of God. The more intense the feeling, the greater the spiritual development. Poetry and music have refinement of emotion as their aim. And the closest parallel to mystical ecstasy is the sexual orgasm. Love without intercourse and orgasm is as unthinkable as music without a violin. Divine love is the sublimation of sexual love. It is the music of the human soul; its most vivid expression is in and through sexual union. This gilds the vision, lends enchantment even to prosaic persons. It was of this refinement of human loves, and its sublimation by sensitive poets, artists and men of enlightenment that the authors of the *Gita Govinda* and the *Bhagavata Purana* spoke.

The art of Kangra, which had its birth at Guler and reached maturity at the court of Maharaja Sansar Chand, ultimately reached the remote state of Tehri Garhwal deep in the Himalayas. In the history of art there can have been few more isolated centers of painting. The themes are appropriately exotic. Plate 34 illustrates a verse from the *Chaurapanchasika*, or *Fifty Stanzas of the Thief*, by the Kashmiri poet Bilhana. The red color of the carpet—red is the symbol of passion—provides an appropriate setting for the drama. The moon behind the mountain, and the birds dozing on the bank of the lake, show that it is late in the night. The thief's countenance suggests lechery, eagerness and expectation. That of the princess shows expectation, approval and calm. Few transgressors ever faced a more happy prospect. The thief is doing well.

Bilhana lived, with great repute, in the late eleventh or early twelfth century. His fifty stanzas on the secret love of a thief for a princess have a unique place in erotic literature. Eventually this happy concourse came to the notice of the king. The thief was sentenced to death. As he was led to the place of execution, he recited the poem in which the pleasures of his secret love for the princess are narrated with rich and varied feeling. So well did he recall the charms of his beloved, the anxiety of waiting, the joys of dalliance, that the poet was forgiven and permitted to marry the princess.

Thus he describes the princess in wait for her lover: "Even today do I see her, as, head resting on her hand and eyes fixed on my path—though in truth I was hidden behind the door nearby—she sought to sing in sweet tones a verse into which she had woven my name." And thus he recalls the pleasures of love in union: "Even today do I see the fair arms that encircled my neck, when she clasped me close to her breast, and pressed her face against my own in a kiss, while her playful eyes half closed in ecstasy.

"Even today here echo in my heart the words—sweet whether they bore meaning or not—of my fair one, when her eyes were shut in sleep and she was heavy with our love-play."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The Bilhana quotations are from Arthur B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London, 1920), pp. 189-190.



Plate 34. Thief diverted from duty by a princess. Garhwal, about 1820  
*Kejriwal Collection, Calcutta*

And thus he yearns for one last sight of his beloved before the flame of life is extinguished: "Could I but see at the close of day once more my love with the eyes of a fawn, and milk-white rounded breasts, gladly would I sacrifice the highest joys of here and hereafter." Since he was reprieved, no sacrifice was required.

Painting in the Kangra style continued in the Punjab Hills till late in the nineteenth century. After the decline of Sansar Chand some of the artists migrated to the court of Ranjit Singh at Lahore, where they painted portraits of the Sikh ruler and his generals. After 1830, the subjects have long flowing beards and splendid turbans rather than the trimmed beards in the Muslim style. In the Kangra Valley itself, there was a gradual decline in the art. As its vitality lessened, the painting became heavy and ornate. The late paintings are elaborately embellished and ornamented, and they lack the rhythmic line and mastery of color of the great period. The patrons had gone. And gone too, as so often before in India, were the men of genius who depended upon them.



Mohinder Singh Randhawa, perhaps the best known of Indian art critics and historians, has written extensively on the history of Indian painting. In addition, he is a naturalist, soil conservationist and civil servant. A native of the Punjab, he passed into the great Indian Civil Service in the days of British rule by self-preparation at a time when not many Oxford graduates could succeed in the competition for this elite service. He is now Commissioner of Chandigarh, the city Corbusier was so instrumental in enriching.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., tells that President Kennedy often described John Kenneth Galbraith, Ambassador to India from 1961 to 1963, as his best overseas representative. When he left India, Ambassador Galbraith also received the warm public praise of Prime Minister Nehru — perhaps the only ambassador ever so singled out. He is Paul M. Warburg Professor of Economics at Harvard University, an active figure in public affairs and Democratic politics, and the author of *The Affluent Society*, *The Great Crash* and *The Liberal Hour*. His most recent work is *The New Industrial State*.

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